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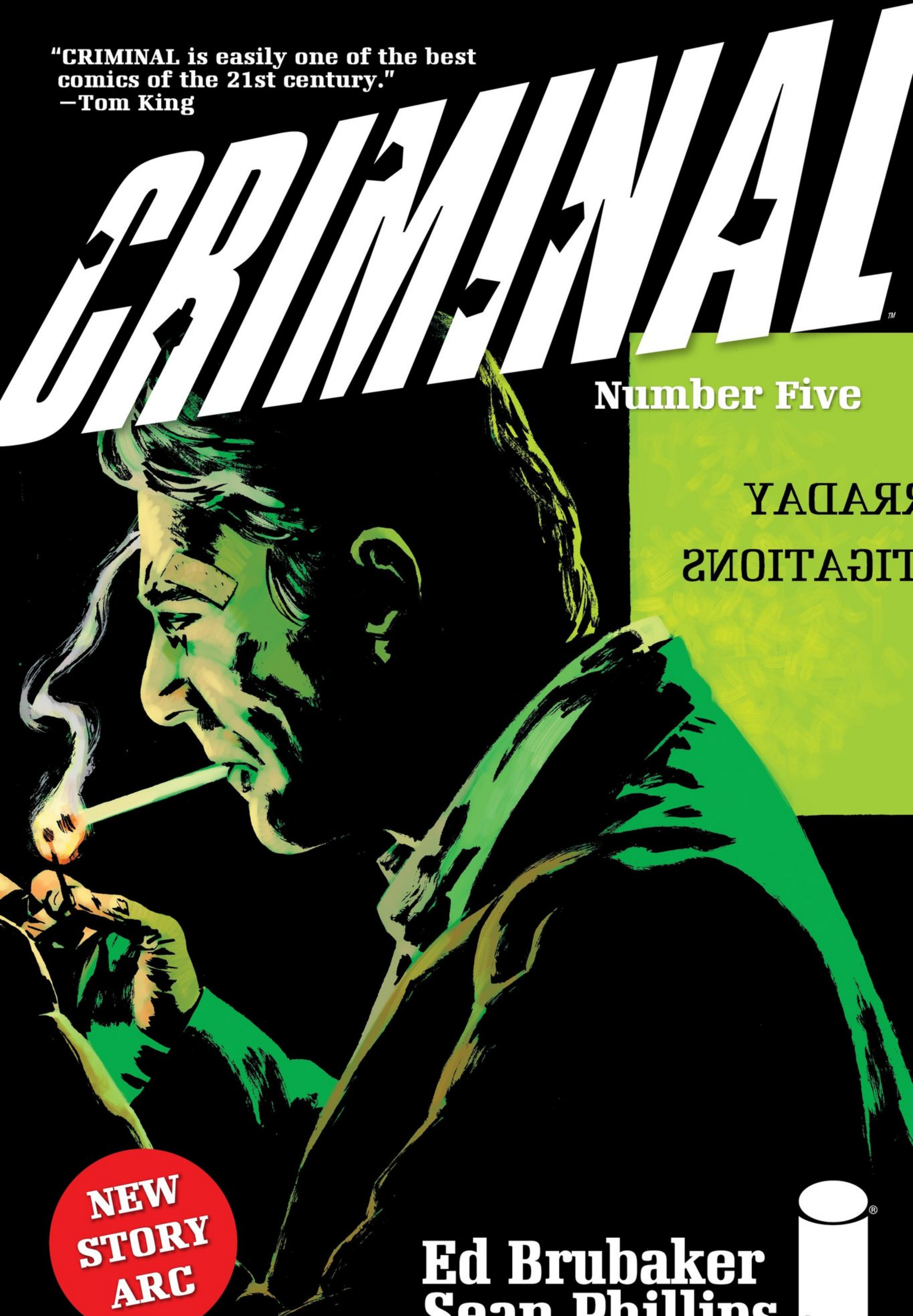
—Tom King

CRIMINAL™

Number Five

YADAAY
SNOITAGIT



NEW STORY ARC

Ed Brubaker
Sean Phillips

image®

by
Ed Brubaker and
Sean Phillips

Colors by
Jacob
Phillips

Cruel Summer

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Publication design by Sean Phillips

Night of the Hunter

But he didn't care.

SO WHY NOT TAKE THE *HINT?*

WELL... I WAS HOPING MY *CHARM* MIGHT WIN YOU OVER, ANYWAY.

THAT'S A *GREYHOUND*, RIGHT?

Or at least, he didn't care enough to *stop* himself.

CAN WE GET ANOTHER ROUND HERE?

GREYHOUND FOR THE LADY... A *WHISKEY* FOR ME.

SURE.

I'M ACTUALLY *WAITING* FOR SOMEONE...

SO YOU *REALLY* NEED TO MOVE ALONG.

BUT I HAVEN'T TOLD YOU WHAT I DO FOR A *LIVING* YET.

AND I HAVE A REALLY *INTERESTING* JOB.

OKAY, FINE... WHAT DO YOU *DO?*

I'M A *PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR.*

SERIOUSLY?

YEAH. I CAN SHOW YOU MY *LICENSE* IF YOU WANT.

NO. THAT'S OKAY.

HERE YOU GO, FOLKS.

KEEP THE CHANGE.

SO... ARE YOU ON A *CASE* RIGHT NOW?

YEAH, I AM.

I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU, *JANE*...

...OR IS IT *MARINA?*

...SHIT...

RELAX... I JUST WANT TO *TALK*...

I *PROMISE.*

That look on her face, as she's considering it...

It cuts right through him.

WELL, AT LEAST YOU GOT MY *DRINK* RIGHT.

Yeah, this is definitely a mistake, he thinks.

SO... WHAT DO YOU WANT TO *TALK* ABOUT?

But really, he'd been playing this one wrong from the start.

The client had been difficult to even ***meet*** with... Wouldn't come to Farraday's ***office***.

Wouldn't go anywhere ***public***.

MR ***WYNDHAM...?***

YES... THANKS FOR COMING ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE.

CAN WE GET IN YOUR ***CAR***, PLEASE?

OUT OF SIGHT?

NO ONE'S GONNA SEE US ***DOWN HERE***, SIR...

WHY DON'T YOU JUST TELL ME HOW I CAN HELP YOU?

He hated guys like this. Financial industry types... Political movers...

WELL... IT'S KIND OF A ***COMPLEX*** SITUATION...

I'M SURE IT IS.

Guys who got their ***picture*** in the paper whenever they went to a charity event or the ***Mayor's Ball***.

Kirk and Nanette Wyndham at MOMA Opening Night

MY FRIEND GERALD SAID YOU KNEW HOW TO BE *DISCREET*...

CAN I *RELY* ON THAT?

ABSOLUTELY.

IF I KNOW *ANYTHING*, IT'S HOW TO KEEP MY MOUTH SHUT.

Exit

WELL... THEN... I NEED YOU TO *FIND* SOMEONE FOR ME... A GIRL.

WOMAN, I MEAN.

SOMEONE YOU WERE SLEEPING WITH?

YES... AND PAYING HER *RENT*, TOO...

WHICH WASN'T AS EASY TO *HIDE*.

Farraday hated ***cases*** like this even more than he hated ***guys*** like Kirk Wyndham.

If a rich man's ***mistress*** runs off, nine times out of ten she's got good reason.

And not just because the guy won't leave his wife, like Wyndham says.

...AND HER PHONE JUST KEEPS *RINGING*...

THERE'S NOT EVEN AN *ANSWERING MACHINE* ANYMORE...

But Farraday couldn't afford to be choosy...

His mortgage was three months past due and Wyndham was paying upfront, in cash.

SO... WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I *FIND* HER?

THEN YOU CALL *ME* AND TELL ME WHERE SHE *IS*.

AND WHAT ARE *YOU* GONNA DO?

OH, NO... YOU'VE GOT THE *WRONG* IDEA...

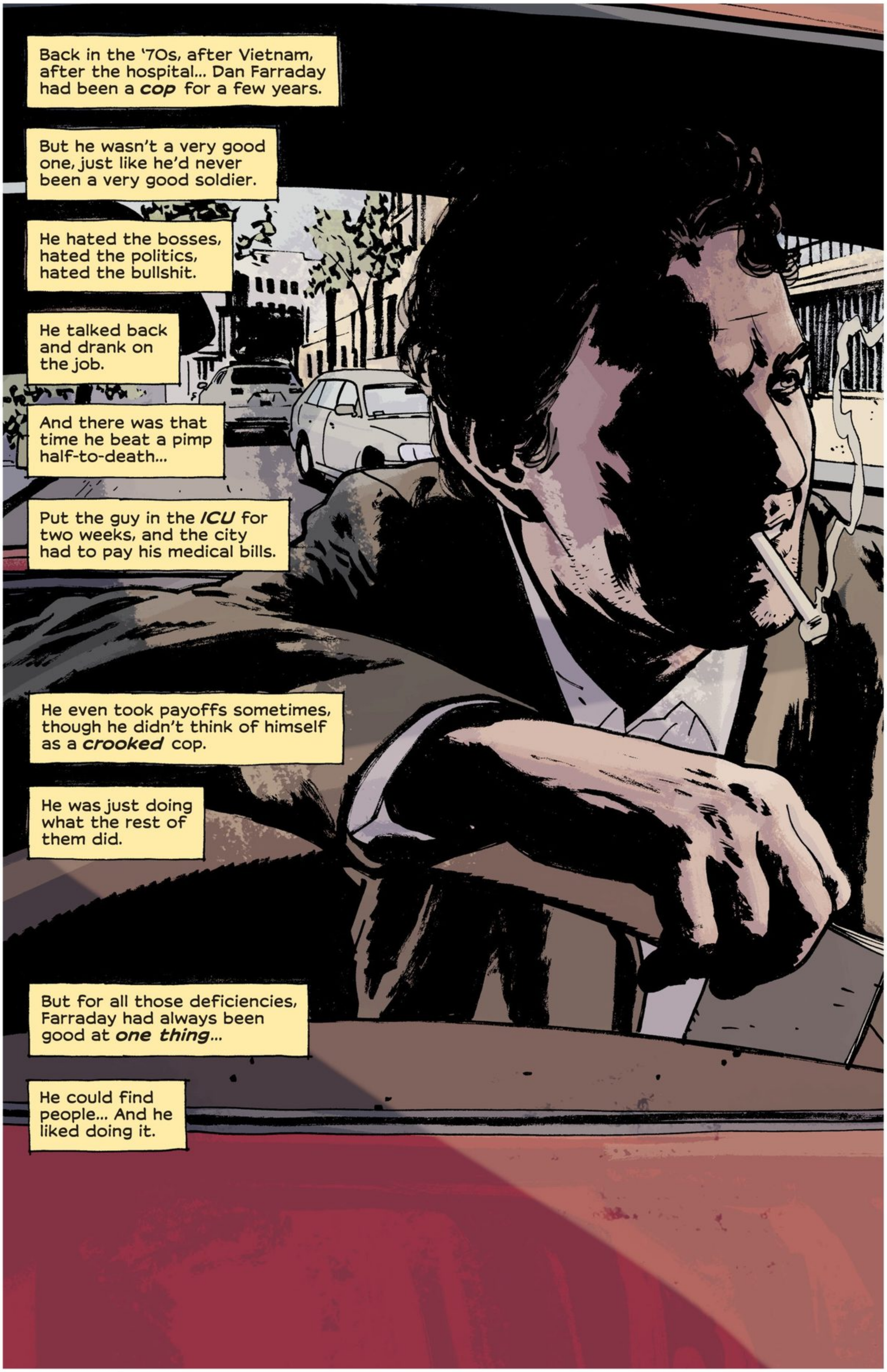
I JUST NEED TO *SEE* HER AGAIN... TO MAKE HER *UNDERSTAND*...

...WHAT SHE *MEANS* TO ME.

A heartbroken liar with too much money and a kept woman on the run...

Yeah, he *really* hated cases like this.

ALL RIGHT... TELL ME WHAT I NEED TO *KNOW* ABOUT THIS WOMAN...


Back in the '70s, after Vietnam, after the hospital... Dan Farraday had been a *cop* for a few years.
But he wasn't a very good one, just like he'd never been a very good soldier.
He hated the bosses, hated the politics, hated the bullshit.
He talked back and drank on the job.
And there was that time he beat a pimp half-to-death...
Put the guy in the *ICU* for two weeks, and the city had to pay his medical bills.
He even took payoffs sometimes, though he didn't think of himself as a *crooked* cop.
He was just doing what the rest of them did.
But for all those deficiencies, Farraday had always been good at *one thing*...
He could find people... And he liked doing it.

He made most of his living this way now... Tracking down bail jumpers, or teenage runaways.

9922 GREER ST - Apt 1544

It just wasn't a great living, was the problem.

He could make a lot more doing criminal defense, or divorce cases.

But that kind of work wasn't Farraday's thing... He was a hunter.

AFTERNOON, MA'AM... I'M AN *INVESTIGATOR* AND I NEED ACCESS TO THE *APARTMENT* OF *JANE HANSON*...

I HAVE *PERMISSION* FROM THE CURRENT LEASE-HOLDER.

And here's how the hunt went ***this*** time...

At the girl's ***apartment***, anything that might lead to her had been removed.

No bills, no personal mail, no receipts in the trash.

Looked like she cleaned the place up, packed a bag, and left.

But there was a glass in the sink, with lipstick on it.

His friend at the crime lab could get a print off that, and maybe give him Jane's ***real*** name.

He used the redial button on her phone to find out the last thing she did was call a ***taxi***.

And fifty bucks to the ***dispatcher*** at the cab company gave him her destination...

...An upscale hotel downtown.

The prick at the ***front desk*** took the twenty bucks Farraday offered, then told him he didn't recognize her picture.

And the bartender said she looked like half the girls in there ***every night***.

But the guy running the ***valet stand*** gave him something.

The night Jane was here, a classic ***Porsche Roadster*** went missing from the parking lot.

The ***owner*** had been in the bar, talking up a woman in red leather...

And the next morning he couldn't find his valet ticket, and his car was gone.

The Porsche was found three days later... A hundred miles away.

Down the street from where it was abandoned, there were two motels.

The night manager at the first one started ***giggling*** when Farraday showed him Jane's photo...

...And it cost him a ***hundred bucks*** to find out what was so funny.

The old man had put Jane up on the ***second floor***, in a room that had security cameras aimed at it.

He had tape of all four days she'd stayed there... When she ***seduced*** the man in the room across the courtyard.

Undressing in front of her windows, bumping into him at the top of the stairs...

Bringing him back to her room... Fucking him with the lights on...

It was all on the security tape, and the old man had been watching it over and over.

Another twenty bucks bought Farraday the phone number of the guy co-starring in the tape with her...

And that poor bastard tells him Jane took his credit cards ***and*** his car.

Said if he called the cops, she'd send pictures of them to his wife.

He hadn't even ***cancelled*** the cards yet, he was so afraid.

It was around then Farraday realized he was starting to like her.

Tracking the stolen credit cards simplified things a bit.

He was only a day behind her when he got to the motel off Highway 10...

...Where he found a ***pawn shop*** voucher in the trash.

The guy at the shop remembered Jane, and showed him what she had ***hocked***...

An emerald ***necklace*** Farraday was pretty sure he'd seen his client's wife wearing in the ***Society pages***.

So... why didn't Wyndham ***tell him*** the girl had stolen it?

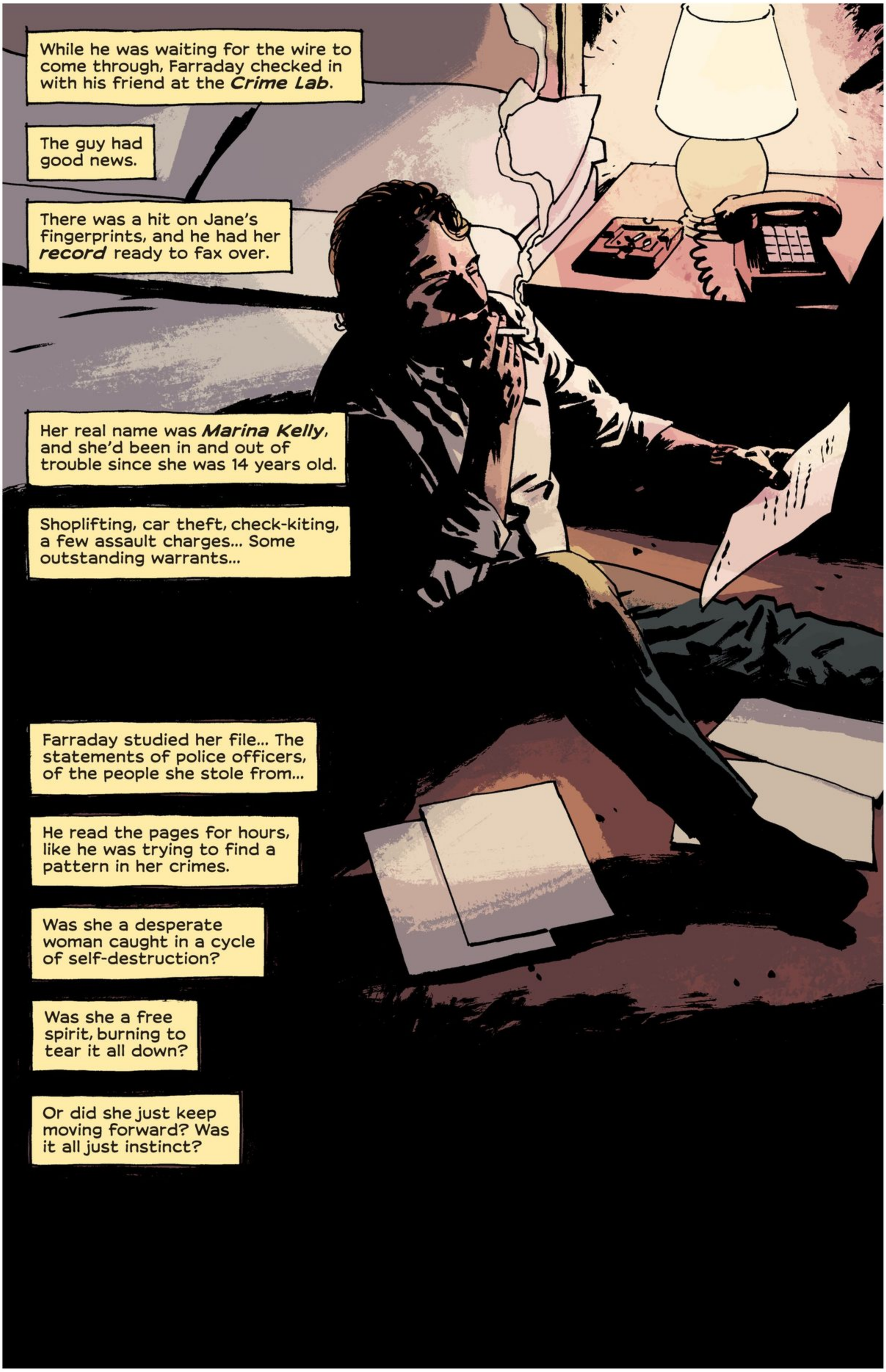
MAYBE BECAUSE I DIDN'T ***KNOW***...

JUST TELL ME WHERE TO ***WIRE YOU*** MORE CASH, AND GET IT ***BACK*** FOR ME, OKAY?

SURE...

...THERE'S A ***WESTERN UNION*** DOWN THE STREET.

JUST GET IT ***BACK***... AND ***FIND*** HER.


While he was waiting for the wire to come through, Farraday checked in with his friend at the *Crime Lab*.
The guy had good news.
There was a hit on Jane's fingerprints, and he had her *record* ready to fax over.
Her real name was *Marina Kelly*, and she'd been in and out of trouble since she was 14 years old.
Shoplifting, car theft, check-kiting, a few assault charges... Some outstanding warrants...
Farraday studied her file... The statements of police officers, of the people she stole from...
He read the pages for hours, like he was trying to find a pattern in her crimes.
Was she a desperate woman caught in a cycle of self-destruction?
Was she a free spirit, burning to tear it all down?
Or did she just keep moving forward? Was it all just instinct?

He'd been sleeping in motel rooms or his car for two weeks now...

Which made him think about his mother, the years they lived on the road.

Motels, truck stops... Moving whenever she blew up her life again.

Maybe that was why he liked the ***hunt*** so much.

Because as fucked-up as those years were... A single mom and her kid on their own, back in the '50s...

There was something ***comforting*** about them, too.

Center City 180

He knew his mother's moods, he could see her explosions coming...

And he loved the way he felt inside, when she slammed the car door and they drove away.

Maybe he was always chasing that feeling.

This woman reminded Farraday of his mother a bit, in the way she ran...

But that wasn't why he crossed the line for her, betrayed his client.

No, his mother was just one of ***many*** women he'd let down in his life.

One of many ***weights*** he always carried.

That was why he talked to Jane that night in the hotel bar...

WELL, AT LEAST YOU GOT MY ***DRINK*** RIGHT.

When he finally caught up to her.

Because he couldn't carry another one.

SO... WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ***TALK*** ABOUT?

WE COULD *START* WITH WHY YOU RAN OFF ON *KIRK WYNDHAM* LAST MONTH...

BUT I *THINK* I KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT ALREADY.

KIRK...?

THAT'S WHO SENT YOU... REALLY?

WELL, *SCREW* HIM...

THAT *DICKHEAD* DESERVED A LOT WORSE THAN ME STEALING SOME *NECKLACES.*

WHAT DID HE *DO?*

MOSTLY JUST SLAPPED ME AROUND, WHENEVER HE DIDN'T WANT MY *OPINION*...

BUT THE LAST STRAW WAS PUTTING A *CIGAR* OUT ON THE INSIDE OF MY THIGH.

I CAN PUT UP WITH A *LITTLE* VIOLENCE... BUT THERE ARE *LIMITS.*

JESUS...

IS THAT *TRUE?*

YOU'VE MET THE MAN, WHAT DO *YOU* THINK?

WELL... I'M NOT SURE HE'S EXACTLY *VLAD THE IMPALER...*

BUT THAT DOES SEEM TO BE YOUR TYPE.

OH, I SEE - YOU FOUND OUT MY *REAL* NAME, YOU READ SOME *COURT RECORDS...*

AND NOW YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT ME *ALL* FIGURED OUT?

CHRIST... GUYS LIKE YOU ARE THE WORST...

GUYS LIKE ME?

FUCKING *ROMANTICS.*

OH, NO... YOU'RE *WAY* OFF THE MARK THERE.

REALLY? THEN WHY ARE YOU *HERE* RIGHT NOW?

Dan Farraday thinks about that for a second...

And then he decides to tell her a story that he's only ***ever*** told a few times... To a few other women like her.

The story about how he got sent home from Vietnam.

It was like a lot of Vietnam stories...

A mission had gone wrong, and Farraday and the remains of his platoon were lost in the jungle for over a week.

After four days, most of them were out of their minds from fear and starvation.

Farraday thought they would turn to cannibalism soon, and he planned to shoot himself in the head before it came to that.

But on the eighth day, by some miracle, they stumbled out of the jungle... And came upon a small village.

No enemies there. Just old men, women, children. Farmers.

Farraday's platoon was so far gone by this point, it didn't matter. And he couldn't have stopped them even if he'd tried.

They stormed the village like a ***Mongol horde***... Slaughtered most of them, and the ones that survived had it even worse.

Farraday didn't take part in any of it.

He found food, some ***dried meat***... and walked back into the trees.

He sat there for hours, weak jaws tearing at some kind of animal flesh...

Barely hearing the screaming.

Later, when the men were sleeping, one of the village women broke free and got ahold of a rifle.

Farraday woke to gunfire. The man next to him was already dead.

Before he even saw her, he'd been shot twice.

Then she stepped out into the moonlight to finish him off...

...AND WHEN I LOOKED UP AT HER... I SAW HER EYES... AND...

I WISHED THAT I HAD *HELPED* HER.

THEN ONE OF THE GUYS SHOT HER IN THE BACK... AND I WOKE UP IN A *FIELD HOSPITAL* TWO DAYS LATER.

JESUS CHRIST..

NOW I SEE *YOU*, AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE RUNNING FROM...

BUT YOU'RE MAKING SOME DANGEROUS ENEMIES...

AND I DON'T SEE THIS ALL ENDING *WELL* FOR YOU, JANE.

I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF JUST FINE.

MAYBE... BUT IF I'M RIGHT, AND THIS ENDS *UGLY*...

I'M GONNA WISH I'D HELPED *YOU*, TOO.

HNNH...

WELL, I GUESS YOU ARE *SORT OF* CHARMING... IN A WAY.

WHY DON'T WE GO SOMEWHERE WE CAN GET A GOOD DINNER AND A BOTTLE OF WINE?

WE CAN *CONTINUE* THIS CONVERSATION A WHILE.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE *WAITING* FOR SOMEONE?

NO... I JUST SAID THAT TO GET RID OF YOU.

Maybe the girl was right.

Maybe Farraday ***was*** a romantic, but no one else had ever thought of him that way.

WHERE ARE YOU PARKED?

A FEW ROWS DOWN.

Still, her smile... Her smile was so perfect...

Such a killer.

KRAKK

WAKK
KRAAK

SMAKK

KNNCH

TEEG - STOP! HE'S HAD ENOUGH!

They keep him in the hospital a few days, making sure his fractured skull isn't going to kill him.

He tries to explain, but Wyndham fires him before even hearing the whole story...

Says he's going to hire someone else.

-SOMEONE WHO *KNOWS* HOW TO DO THEIR FUCKING *JOB!*

So Farraday tells him the girl is on her way to the East Coast.. which a ***lie***.

But let the prick waste his money searching all over hell.

He doesn't care if anyone's paying him. It's not about that anymore.

HOMELESS VETERAN

It's about the girl.
Farraday doesn't remember much of the beating... Just the name she called out - *Teeg*.
A buddy on the force tells him there's a *Teegar Lawless* down in Bay City, three hours south.

To Be Continued

So we come to the end of chapter one of what will probably be the longest CRIMINAL story ever. And yeah, I know that last issue I said it was going to be called THE SUMMER OF '88 but when I mentioned that to my wife she thought it sounded like a straight to cable coming-of-age movie, so I went back to the drawing board... and pretty quickly landed on CRUEL SUMMER, which is both a better name and evokes the era, too.

As I mentioned before, this is a story that I started planning while working on COWARD, the very first CRIMINAL book, but the way it's turning out is a lot different than my initial idea, although most of the main threads of it are still there. I hope you're enjoying it so far, but you might forget about Dan Farraday before you see him again, because the next two issues focus on Teeg, and then Ricky.

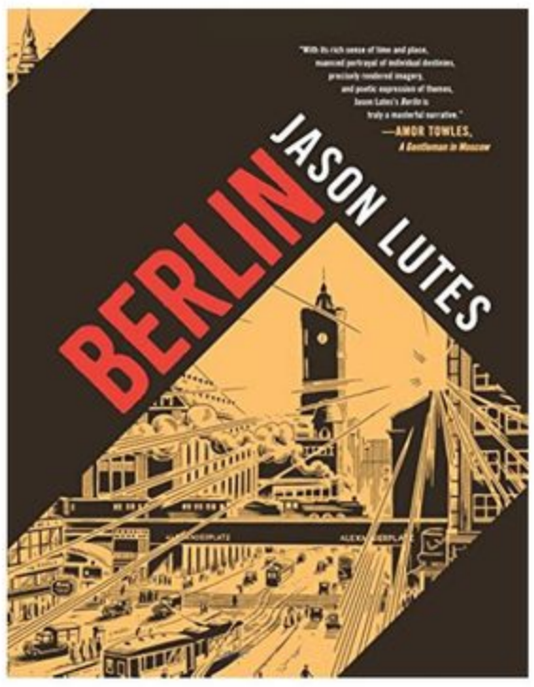
***

The Secret Ingredient is Crime

Okay, let's get to some recommendations...

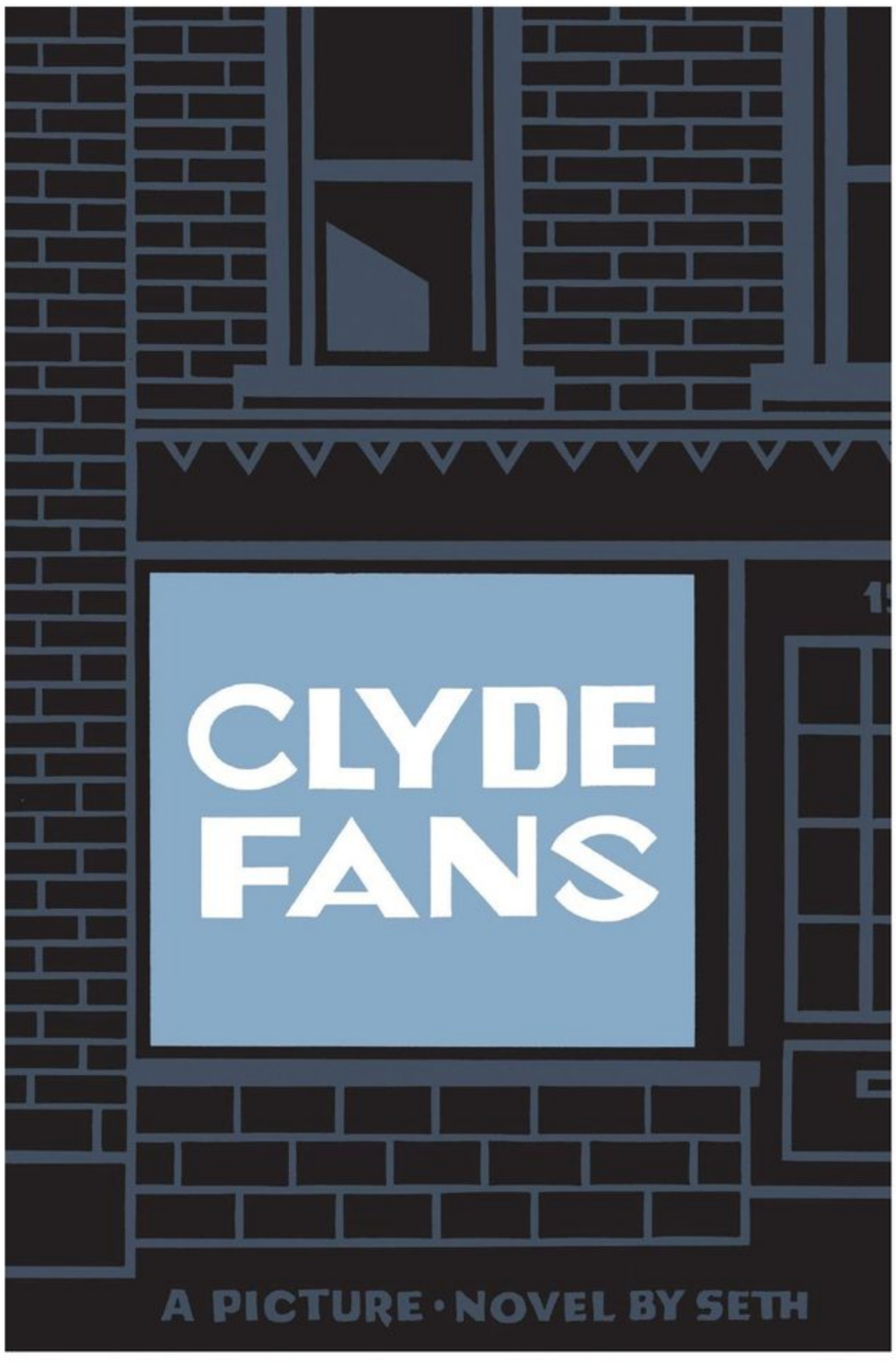
BROCKMIRE – This is a really dark and funny TV show, in its third season currently. Hank Azaria plays the funniest sportscaster in baseball, a big shot sent down from the major leagues to the minors. I don't care about sports at all, and this is one of my favorite shows. The dialog is insane at times, but Azaria is a genius and makes it all work. And the show is shockingly moving at times. Check it out.

BERLIN and CLYDE FANS – In the '90s, two friends of mine, both great cartoonists, started publishing long stories that would end up taking them both decades to finish, and strangely, both of them wrapped up recently and have complete collections out from the fine folks at D & Q.


"With its rich sense of time and place, nuanced portrayal of individual destinies, precisely rendered imagery, and poetic expression of themes, Jason Lutes's Berlin is truly a masterful narrative."
—AMOR TOWLES, A Gentleman in Moscow
BERLIN
JASON LUTES

BERLIN is an epic story about, well, obviously, Berlin. It's the story of the rise of Nazi Germany and the loss of a country. A huge ensemble piece, telling the story of these tragic years from many different points of view, Jason Lutes created a masterwork of humanity, at its best and worst, but always human. A book that's more relevant now than when he started it, BERLIN is a stunning work by a master of comics.

CLYDE FANS by Seth, tells the stories of two brothers who run a small fan company over a few decades in the 20th century. It's a quiet and elegant meditation on the changing times, the love of small handmade things, nostalgia, and so many other things. Seth is a one-of-a-kind cartoonist, and I love and am obsessed with many of the same things about life and art as he is, so I can't recommend his books enough.



Both of these are books anyone serious about comics as art needs to own, so please go out and buy some copies.

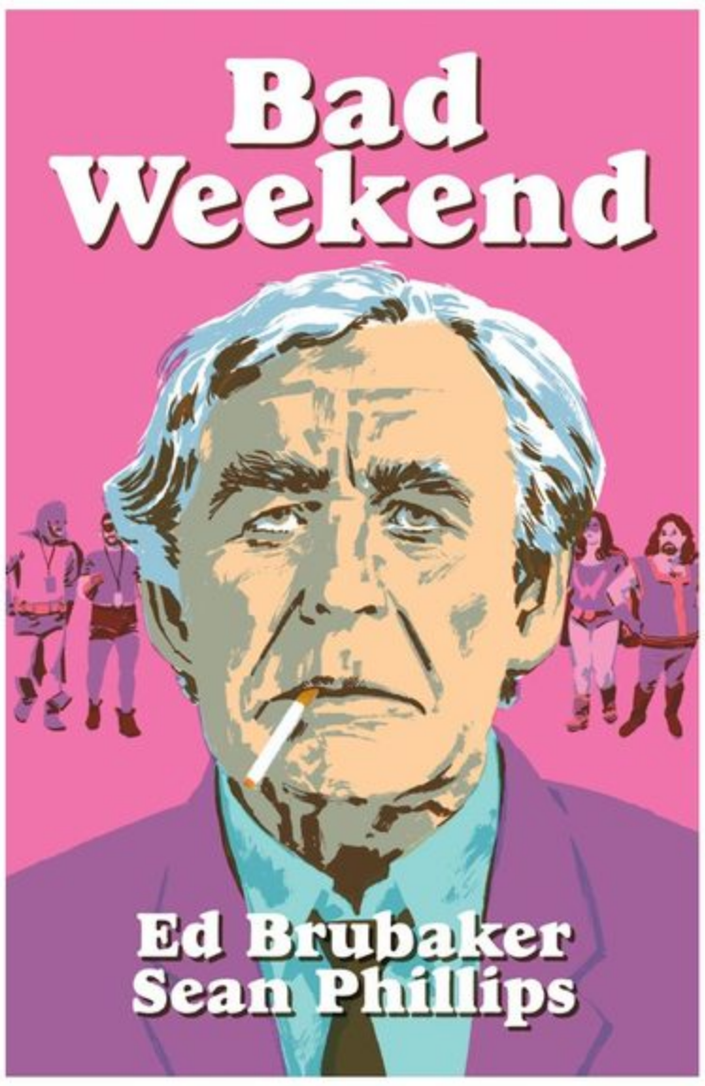
TOO OLD TO DIE YOUNG – As I've mentioned several dozen times, I'm sure, this is the TV show I co-created with Nicolas Winding Refn. It's out on June 14th on Amazon Prime Video, and if you're a fan of what I do, but especially if you're a fan of what Nicolas Refn does, you're going to want to check this show out. It is unlike anything out there, by a wide margin, so expect weird and shocking and hypnotic and gorgeous, all at the same time. Do not expect anything resembling a traditional TV series. Refn directed every episode, and I have been describing it to friends as a series of interlinked movies, that get more surreal as they go along. This is a one-time event, and I doubt even in this crazy era of streaming, that we'll ever see anything quite like it again.

***

I mentioned the BAD WEEKEND hardback last issue, but I thought I'd show you a small peek at the expanded scenes we added. For those single issue readers who are wondering, it's not a new ending or anything that changes the story dramatically. It's some scenes that were in my outline that we didn't have room for, but that I think add some nice character beats. Here's a sample:

For those of you interested, the book will be out the same day as our next issue, just before San Diego Comicon so make sure to ask your comics retailer about it.

***



Our back pages article this issue is a nice roundtable discussion with some of my crime writer friends. Please go and check out their amazing novels…

Sara Gran's most recent book in her Claire DeWitt series, which I love, is THE INFINITE BLACKTOP.

Jason Starr writes some of the most twisted noir since Jim Thompson was in his heyday. His latest is FUGITIVE RED.

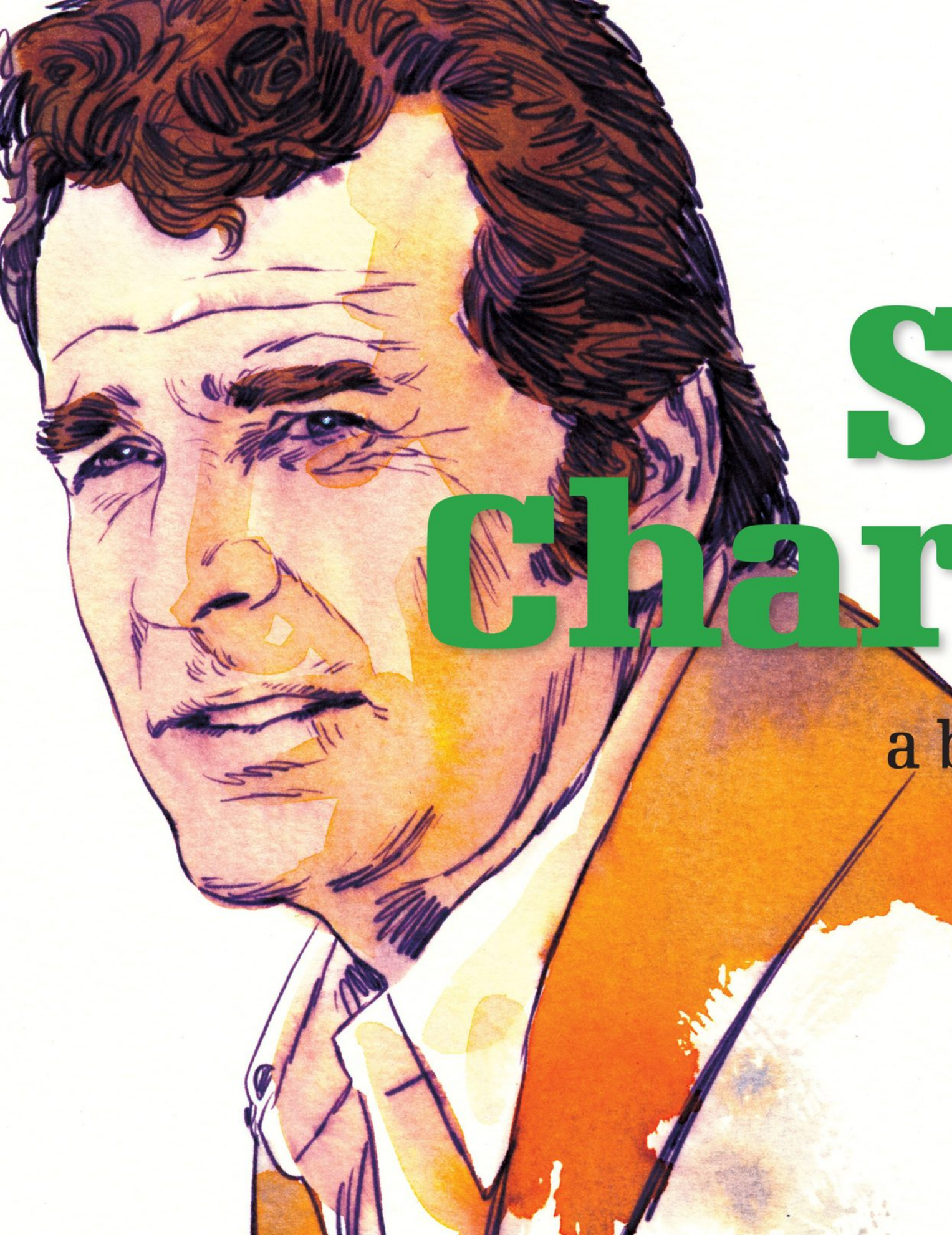
And Alex Segura completes his fantastic modern twist on the private detective series this August, with MIAMI MIDNIGHT.

Buy them wherever and however you get your books.

***

All right, write to us at criminalcomic@gmail.com and let us know your thoughts.

We'll be back with the next part of CRUEL SUMMER next month, with a chapter starring Teeg Lawless, that will look like the cover on the next page…



The Series Character

a brief discussion with
Ed Brubaker
Jason Starr
Alex Segura
Sara Gran
illustrations by
Sean Phillips

One of the constants in my life has been an abiding love of series characters, in comics, in novels, and in films and TV shows. So I asked some writer friends to have a short discussion about all our favorites and the concept in general...

ED BRUBAKER: I think my own bias/love for series characters might be because I started reading through reading comics when I was 3 or 4, and a lot of them were **Spider-Man** and **Archie** and **Batman**, so I came to books already primed to follow a character from story to story. But even so, most of my first favorite books as a kid were series character books -- Like **Encyclopedia Brown** and the **Great Brain**. One a detective, one a crook. And strangely, totally different kinds of series. In the Great Brain books, they were like a soap opera with time passing and characters growing, or trying to, whereas Encyclopedia Brown is more like Archie, always the same age, nothing changing. So I was getting totally different reading experiences from them, but both gave me some kind of joy and comfort, that I wanted to return to again and again.

JASON STARR: Spider-Man was the first for me as well—in comics and in the Sunday strips (which always seemed incoherent plot-wise, but were exciting nevertheless). Then it was **Sherlock Holmes**, when I was about twelve years old. Loved the mysteries and the voice, which really comes from Holmes's attitude. Then I read most of Agatha Christie, who I still think should be studied for plotting.

ALEX SEGURA: **Archie** was my first series character - though, as we all probably realized later, it was more of a sitcom approach than the superhero characters, so there was no continuity beyond character consistency. But I think that influenced me, too, in terms of my own writing - aiming for consistent beats and behaviors instead of hyper-focusing on minor plot points. Spider-Man was my first superhero. I liked Archie because I wanted to be in his world - have this circle of cool but good natured friends, the idea of romance and relationships was also interesting, and Archie played it mostly for gags so I missed a lot of the subtext. Plus, Riverdale seemed so welcoming and peaceful - which was very different from my life growing up, coming from a family of divorce. It seemed really soothing.

SARA GRAN: Archie was very formative for me as well, but he wasn't a detective. The archetypical series detective for me was and is the pair of **Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin** (different Archie!) from the Rex Stout series. Wolfe and Goodwin exist in a kind of limbo where the world changes around them, but they don't change with it, and the world around them kind of bends to protect their lack of change.

As you point out Ed, there's two kinds of series: one where the subjects (Archie/Betty/Veronica/Quincy/Colombo/Wolfe/Goodwin) are stuck in an endless existentially-horrific loop of desire fulfilled and then created again (for a sexual object/recognition/solutions), and the more rare kind where the characters change in time as humans do. The first is a more soothing and dependable read, the second is, for me, more fun to write.

JASON: The only true series I've written are my novels co-written with Ken Bruen. That said, I think when the character in a series changes in time in a humanistic way, the challenge for an author is to find clever ways to make each book in the series accessible to new readers. For example, if a reader comes to your series in Book 3, you need to find clever ways to fill the reader in on what's happened in the past, without making it seem like exposition.

ALEX: I agree with Sara about the two kinds of series - the one that's more evergreen, like **Travis McGee** or **Lew Archer** or even **Marlowe**, where there isn't much change to the protagonist, is really soothing to read and experience. Like comfort food. But as far as writing, I'm much more interested in writing something with an arc, where the hero and his cast evolve and change from book to book. For me, I knew I wanted to write about a character that was learning the ropes and also learning how to be a better person - so you see Pete Fernandez becoming a better PI and also - via his own personal recovery from alcoholism - becoming a better person. It was also me trying to debunk the "hard-drinking PI" trope, which always irked me when not done well - this idea that a guy or lady can drink 12 beers or a bunch of mixed drinks and still manage to save the day. It just never rang true to me.

SARA: I agree so strongly about that. I think originally, drugs and alcohol were (and still can be) a mechanism to show the strangeness or brokenness or shamanistic qualities of detectives, and the whole thing got Hollywood-ized into a glorification of alcohol, which is generally pretty fucking boring.

ED: I really like the way George Pelecanos used alcohol in his early PI novels, where **Nick Stefanos** is debilitated to the point of blackout, and wakes up next to a dead body down by the river. That would have been a good scene even if it wasn't defying a noir trope. Or flipping it. It's the beginning of a noir novel shoved into a detective story.

As for making each book easy for someone to jump into, I think a lot of the series detective novels that I read when I got seriously addicted to PI novels were read out of order, and only rarely did that

make me wonder about something from before. In a mystery people talk about backstory so much, you often don't know if they're talking about something from a previous book or just "the past" in the more vague sense. Like, the Archer books always discuss Lew Archer's past, yet none of them ever refer to a previous book in the series, as far as I can remember.

The Archer books are a strange one, because he never changes as the world around him does. But at the same time, I never got the feeling he was stuck in time the same way Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe were.

JASON: To me, it's more "noir" if the series character ages from book to book and/or have psychological and/or physical issues to overcome. In series books where the mystery is solved and then we just reboot for the next book, it's a safer, non-noir vision. This is why I've never seen Raymond Chandler as a noir writer. Many disagree.

ED: I think that's an argument you could make. Certainly I'd consider the **Parker** novels more procedurals than noir books. I love them, obviously, but they aren't the same as a Jim Thompson novel, you know? It's about watching this character plan and execute another heist. And his life changes only slightly over the years, by design. You learn almost nothing about him but how he sees the world and the people in it. You never even learn his real name. And yet I feel like I know how he'd react in any situation.

Now, I get the feeling that from the '60s through the '80s, series detective books were a much bigger deal than they are now. From the bestseller list, it seems like there are still a lot of characters being followed by readers, but most of them have been around a few decades already -- the Reacher books, Laura Lippman's series, John Sandford, Michael Connelly. Lots more. But I get the sense if you pitched a new series PI to a publisher right now, they might steer you away from it. Are series characters kind of fading in the crime publishing world a bit?

JASON: I think there's less commitment from the large publishers in general now, as opposed to back then. Now there is definitely a short fuse for series books. If the first in the series doesn't exceed expectations they rarely stick with the series. Agents too will encourage authors to start a new series or try to write a blockbuster standalone rather than fight the system.

Actually, I think if an author is psyched about a series character, it's a better long term strategy to go with a smaller publisher who might stick with the series longer, or self publish where you have even more time to build an audience. But, yes, the current publishing system which favors "the big book" makes it much harder to grow a series with a slow build approach.

SARA: Yes, it's ironic that some people still think that writing crime or mystery fiction is a cynical cash grab. Maybe that was true in the '70s (maybe not), but it isn't now.

ED: I guess it's just harder to sell any kind of book or comic right now, in some ways, in spite of how easy it is to find anything you want. But I think it's sad that it's such a struggle – not that all success as an author isn't a combination of struggle and luck anyway – because as a writer, I've found myself drawn back more and more to writing the same characters, and it's been really rewarding. Like, **CRIMINAL** didn't start out to be a series with recurring characters, but it evolved into that, and now I think that each story is a little more rich for all the ones that came before, and I know from hearing from readers that a lot of them feel like these returning characters are people they know and root for. That means a lot.

SARA: Absolutely.
For all my negativity about the business side sometimes, publishing the Claire DeWitt series has been one of the best things to ever happen to me in my life. I've travelled around the US and Europe, made amazing friends, got tons of other work, and most of all, I hear from readers all the time about how these books made an impact on them. If I hadn't gone so deep into this character and this world, which I couldn't do without the series format, I don't think people would connect with the work in the same way. And I think that's the real appeal of a series -- you're not just meeting someone for one great night in a bar, you're getting into a deep and sometimes profound relationship with your characters and your readers, and you can each affect each other and change each other and be of service to each other. That's hugely important to me.

ED: We talked a bit about the comfort quality of the series detective, which I think is something people look down on without realizing how difficult it is to write something that makes a reader want to return to that world again and again. In my 20s, I worked in a used bookstore and this coworker friend, whenever she was going through a low period, she'd break out all the Nero Wolfe books and reread them. She had the same weathered copies that her dad had bought in the '70s, and they meant a lot to her, as beat-up as they were. Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe were her calm place in the storm, basically.

For me, that's the Parker and Lew Archer books, and watching **Columbo** and **Rockford Files** episodes. Nothing makes me smile more than watching Jim Rockford weasel his way out of getting beat-up while pretending to be an IRS agent or something.

What characters do you constantly return to?

ALEX: I love the Lew Archer books, too - because the plots are so tight and effective, and the language - at least in the early books - really evoke Chandler/ Marlowe, but also explore the psyche of "bad guys" in a way Chandler never did (or had to, really). They're comfort food, and whenever I need something to read but don't have the mental capacity to think about too, too much, I turn to Lew Archer. I do the same with Michael Connelly's **Bosch** books. I think it's mostly because I love the character - this aging, contrarian cop out for justice who also has a real heart...like Archer, the case itself doesn't really matter, you just like spending time with these tarnished knights, and it makes for a soothing experience. Ha! Murder is soothing. Yeah, I'm a crime writer, I guess.

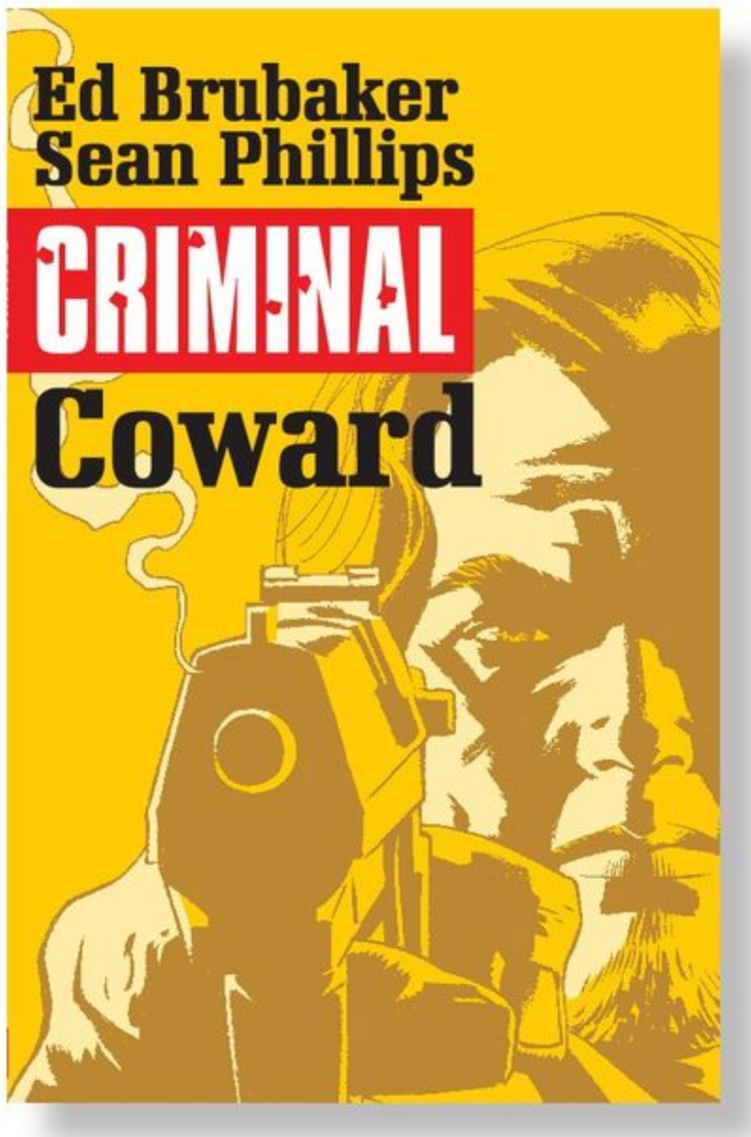
ED: Yeah, my favorite Chandler quote, or one of them, was about how he didn't write whodunnits, he wrote "who cares whodunnits" – meaning it was about the characters and the world and the journey, to him.

JASON: **James Bond** jumps to my mind—the movies and the books. For reading, I don't necessarily need to return to a series for that feeling, though. For me, it's not a matter of returning to the character, it's about returning to a voice or an attitude—like spending time with an old friend you haven't seen in a long time, but always maintain a connection with regardless of how much time passes. So it's usually Elmore Leonard, Jim Thompson, Charles Willeford, Patricia Highsmith, Ken Bruen. In a way, revisiting the classics and my major influences recharges me, and the voices feel familiar at this point.

SARA: Well, **MURDER SHE WROTE** has just started streaming on Amazon, and that has just about made my year. Life has been rough lately and it's been a viewing orgy of **Jessica Fletcher**, **Hercule Poirot**, and **Miss Marple**. These shows really remind me of why I love this genre and have renewed my enthusiasm for writing my own mysteries. Procedurals exist in a magical world where loss, no matter how cruel, is always balanced by justice and followed by a new start. If only real life were so neat!

As much as I love the soothing, repetitive character of these shows as a viewer, as a writer what interests me is the complications behind the predictable surface. For example, I'm convinced that Jessica Fletcher, in her youth, was the maid in **GASLIGHT**—that they're really the same character. A friend once pointed out that Poirot could be gay, and now both he and Miss Marple seem obviously, wonderfully queer to me, though sadly closeted.

Ultimately, over the years, these characters have become some of my best friends, and unlike real people, they're always available, always putting the truth first, have no real needs of their own, and you always know exactly what you're going to get.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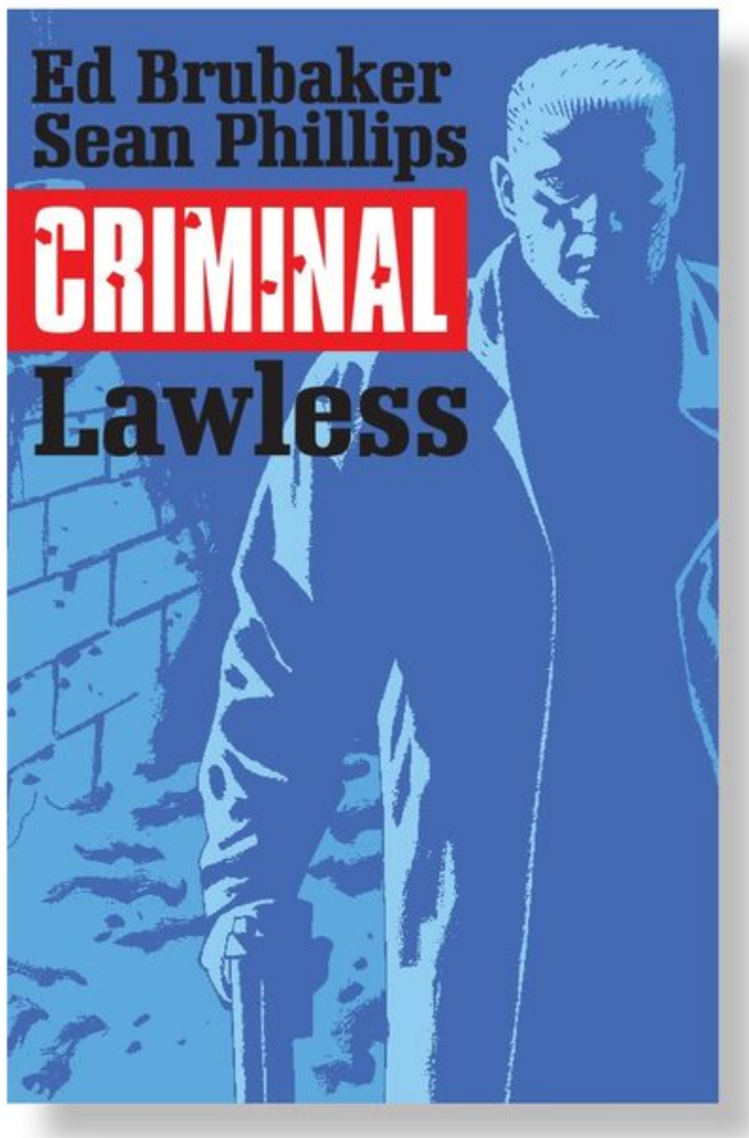
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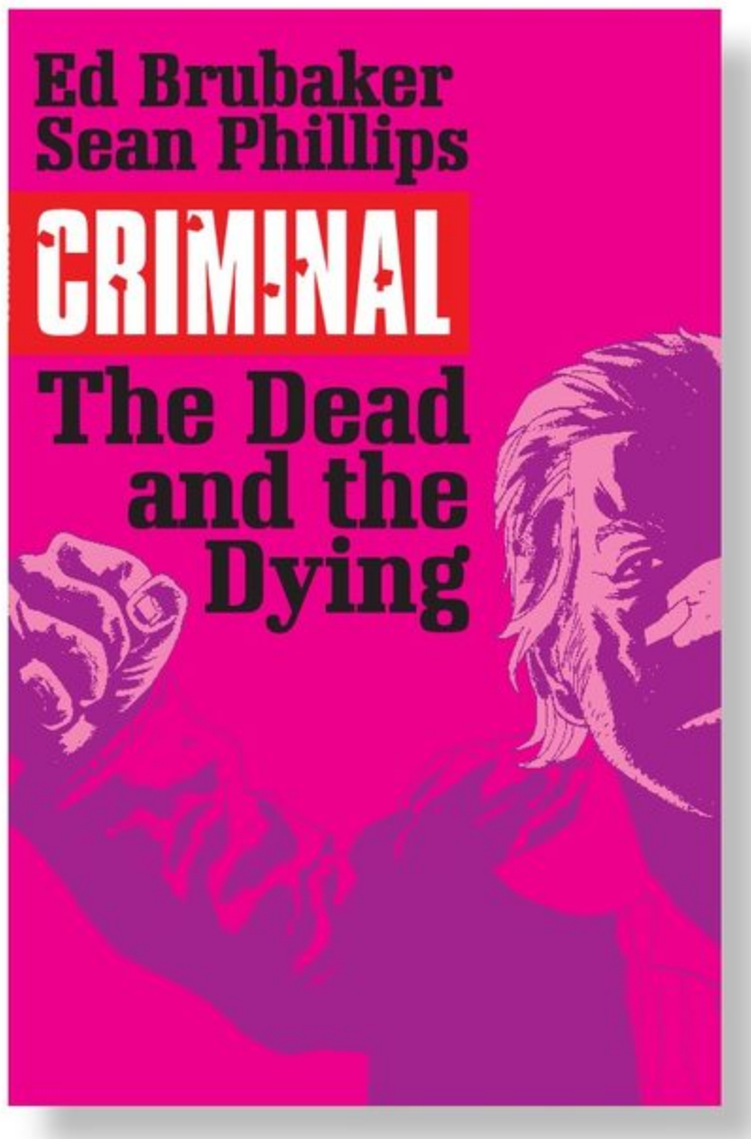
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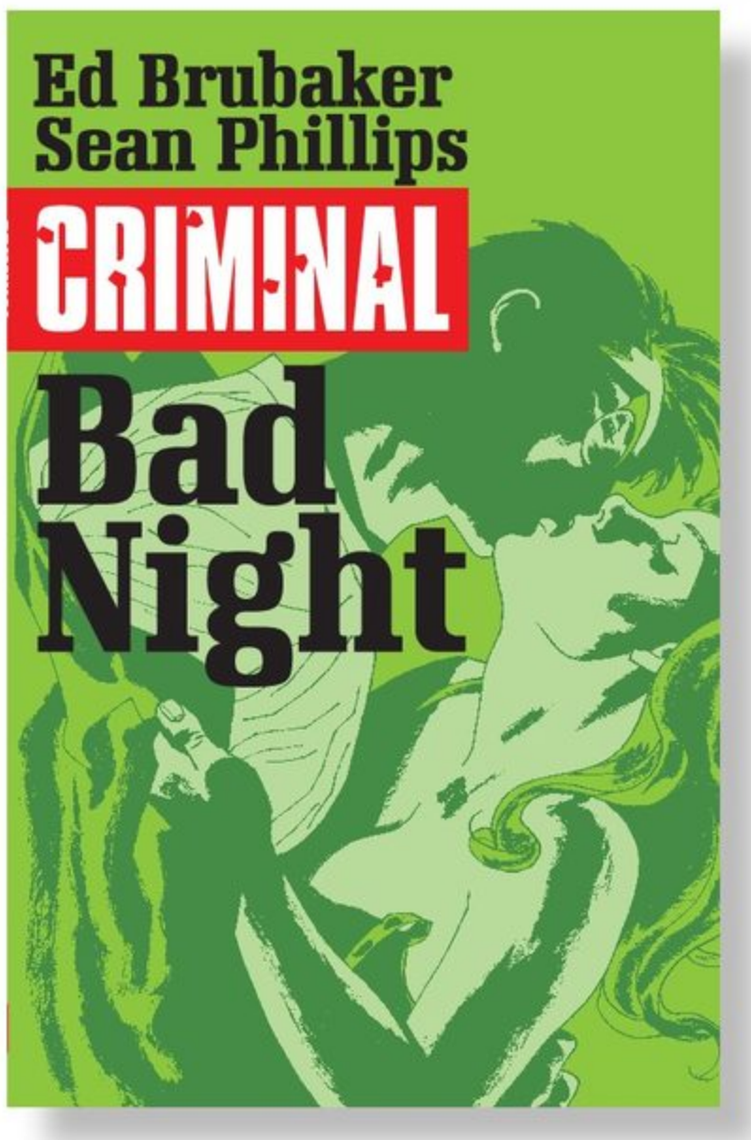
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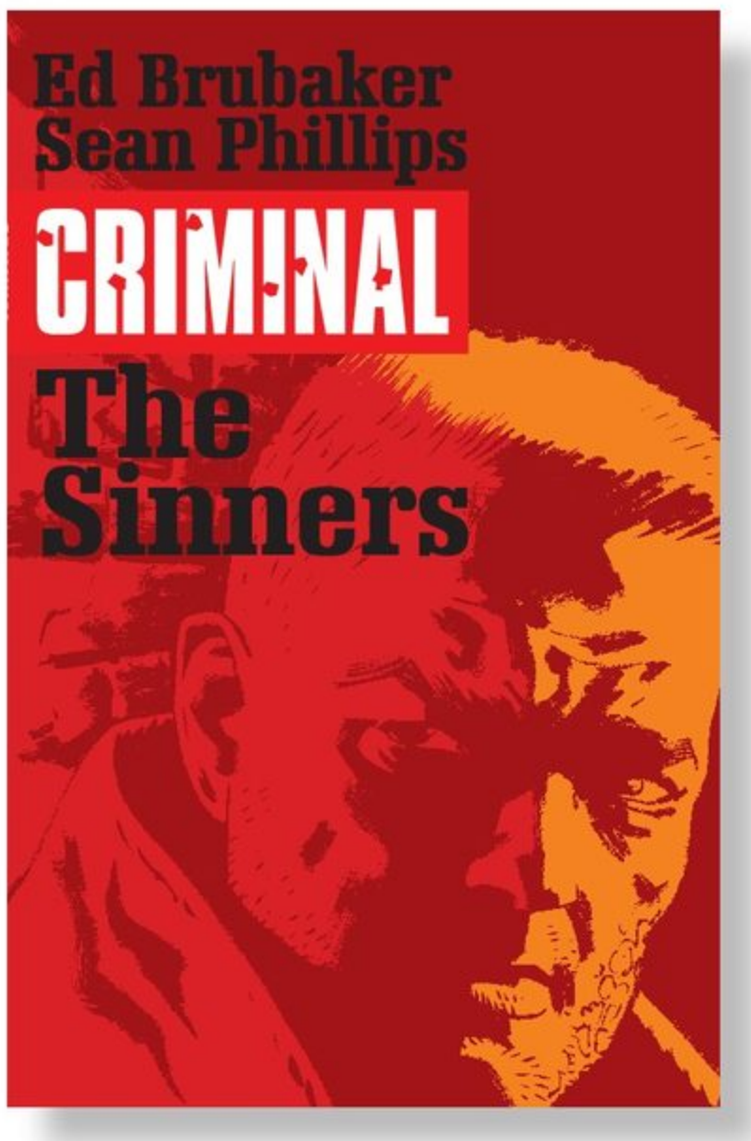
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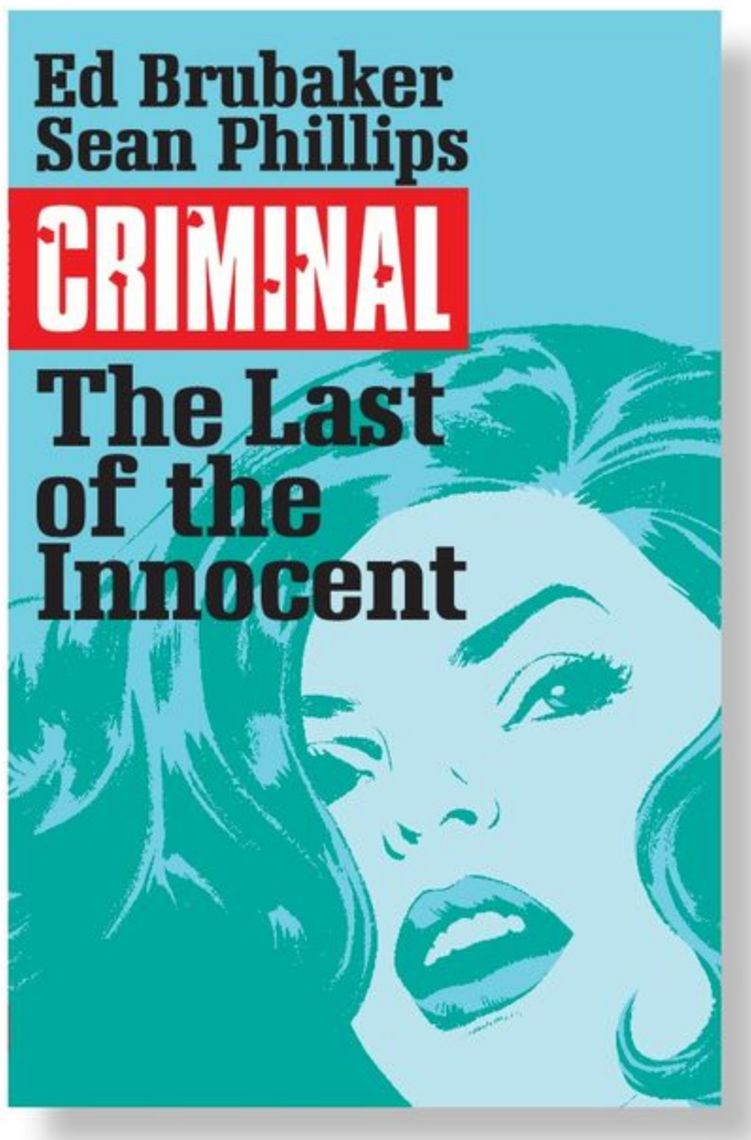
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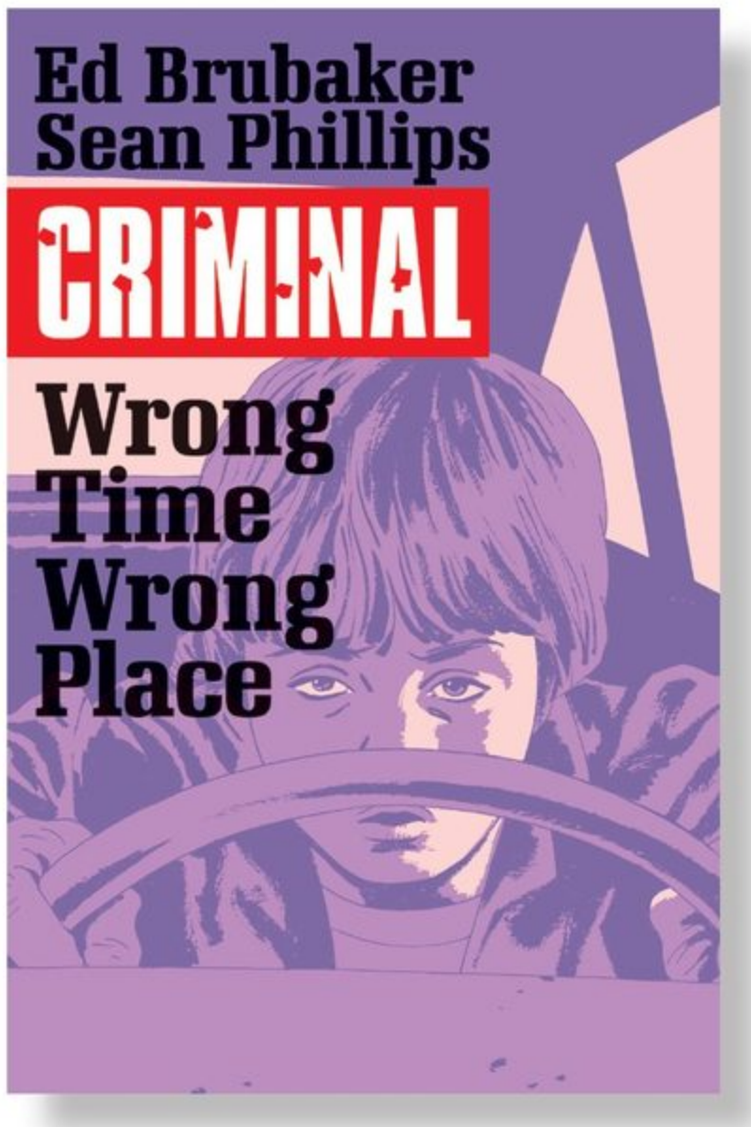
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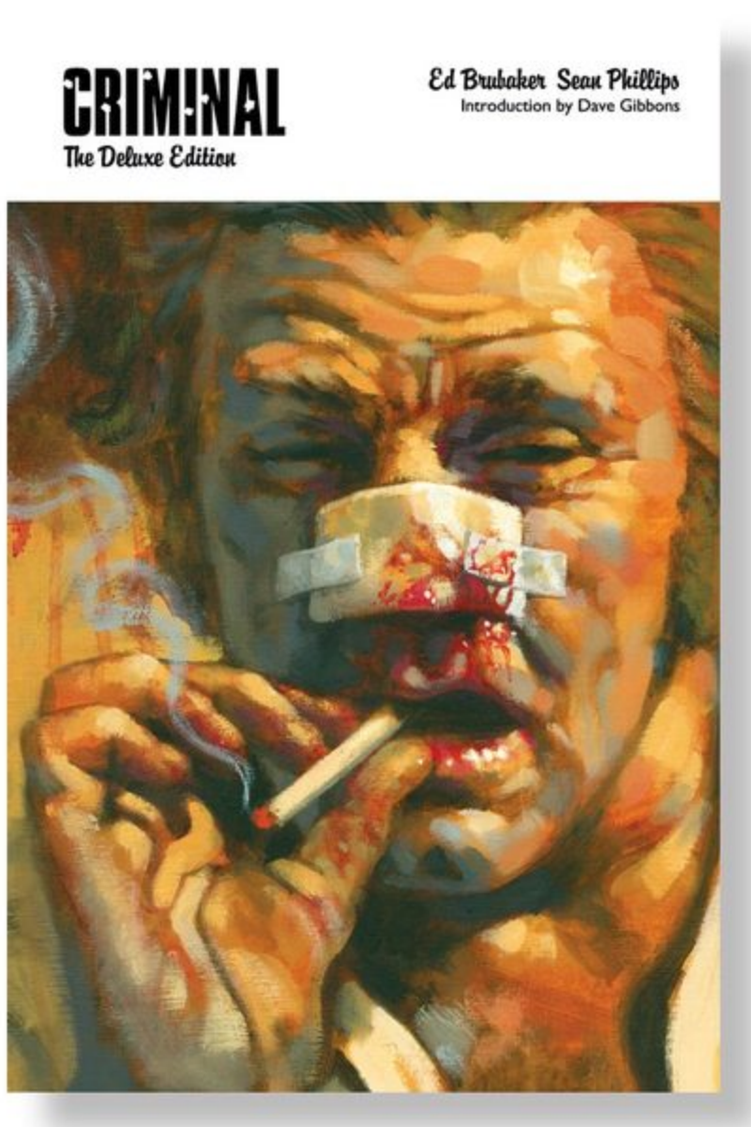
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Introduction by Dave Gibbons

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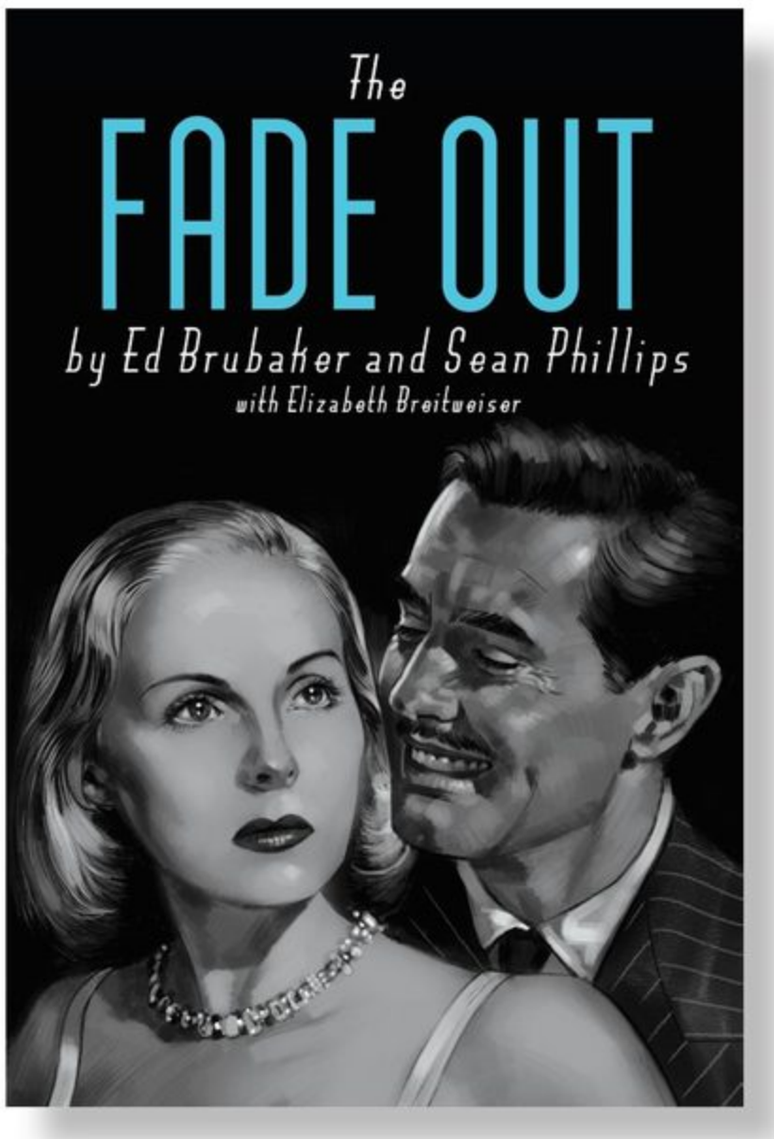
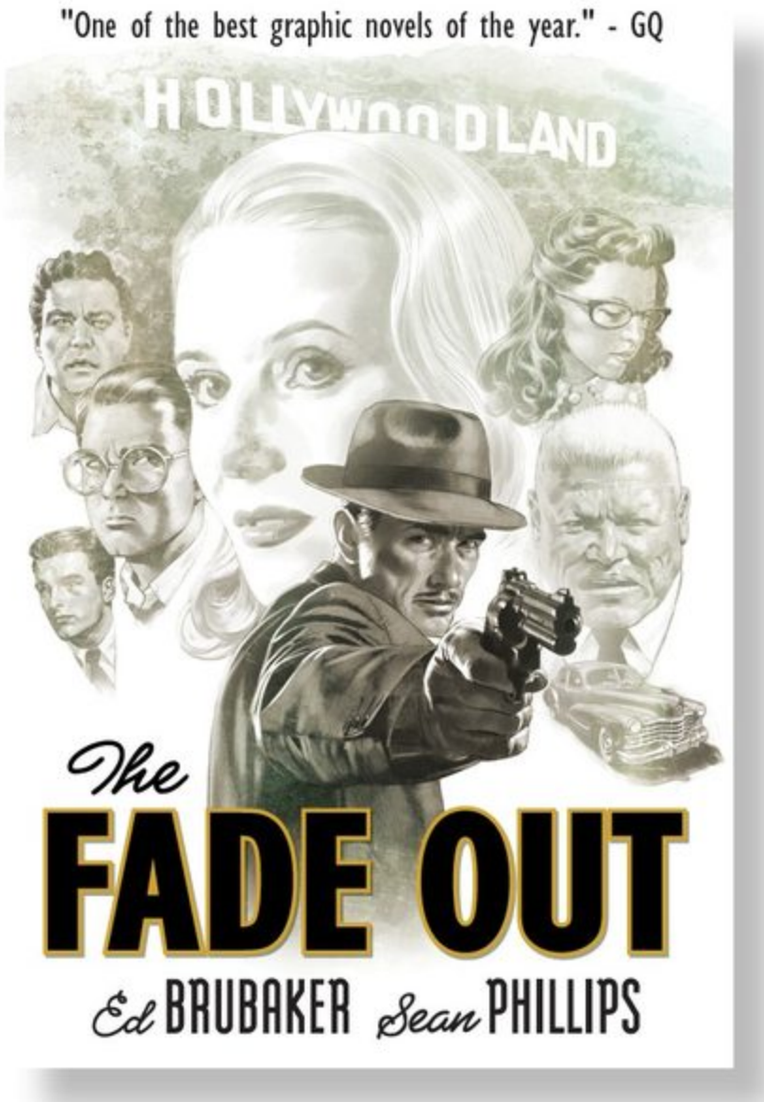


"CRIMINAL is equal parts John Woo's THE KILLER, Stanley Kubrick's THE KILLING, and Francis Ford Coppola's THE GODFATHER."

— Playboy Magazine



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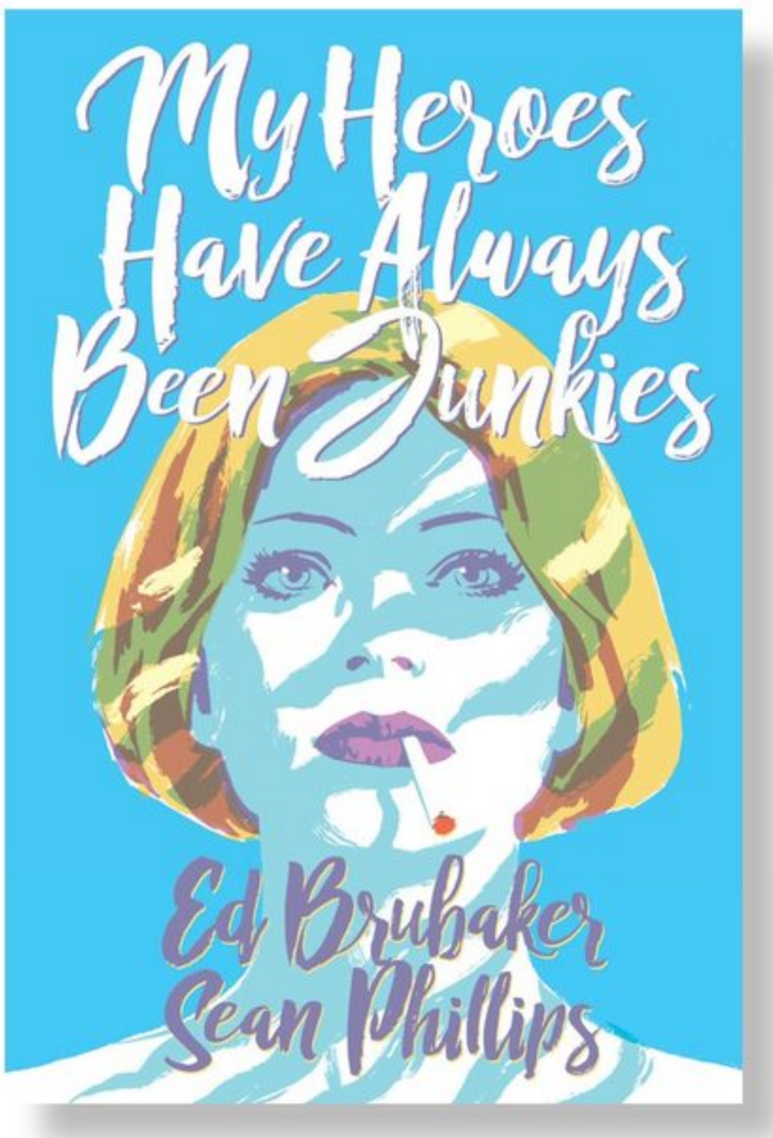

***Newsweek*'s Best Comic Books of 2018**
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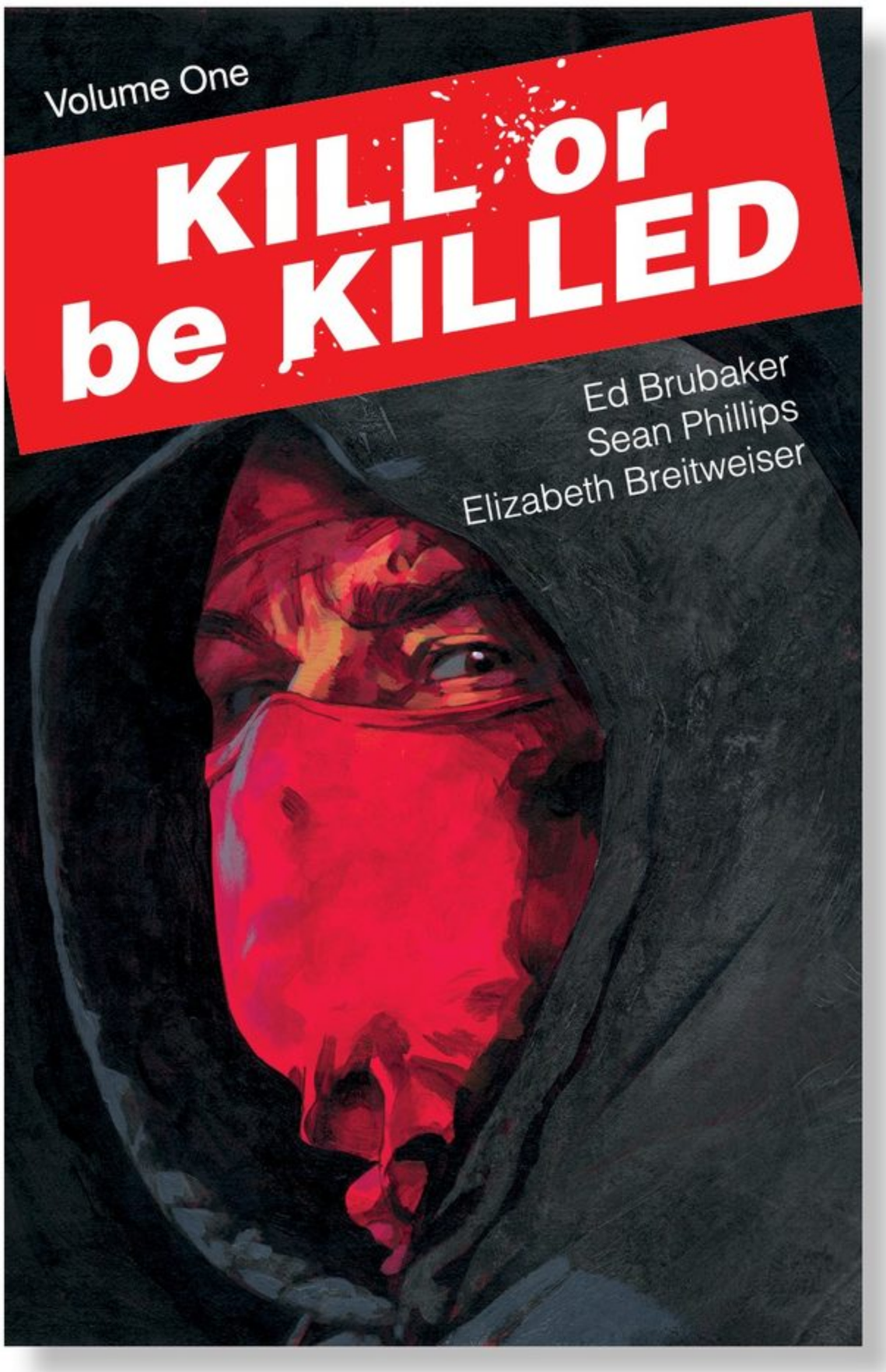
Diamond Gem Award for Best Original Graphic novel 2018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KILL or be KILLED
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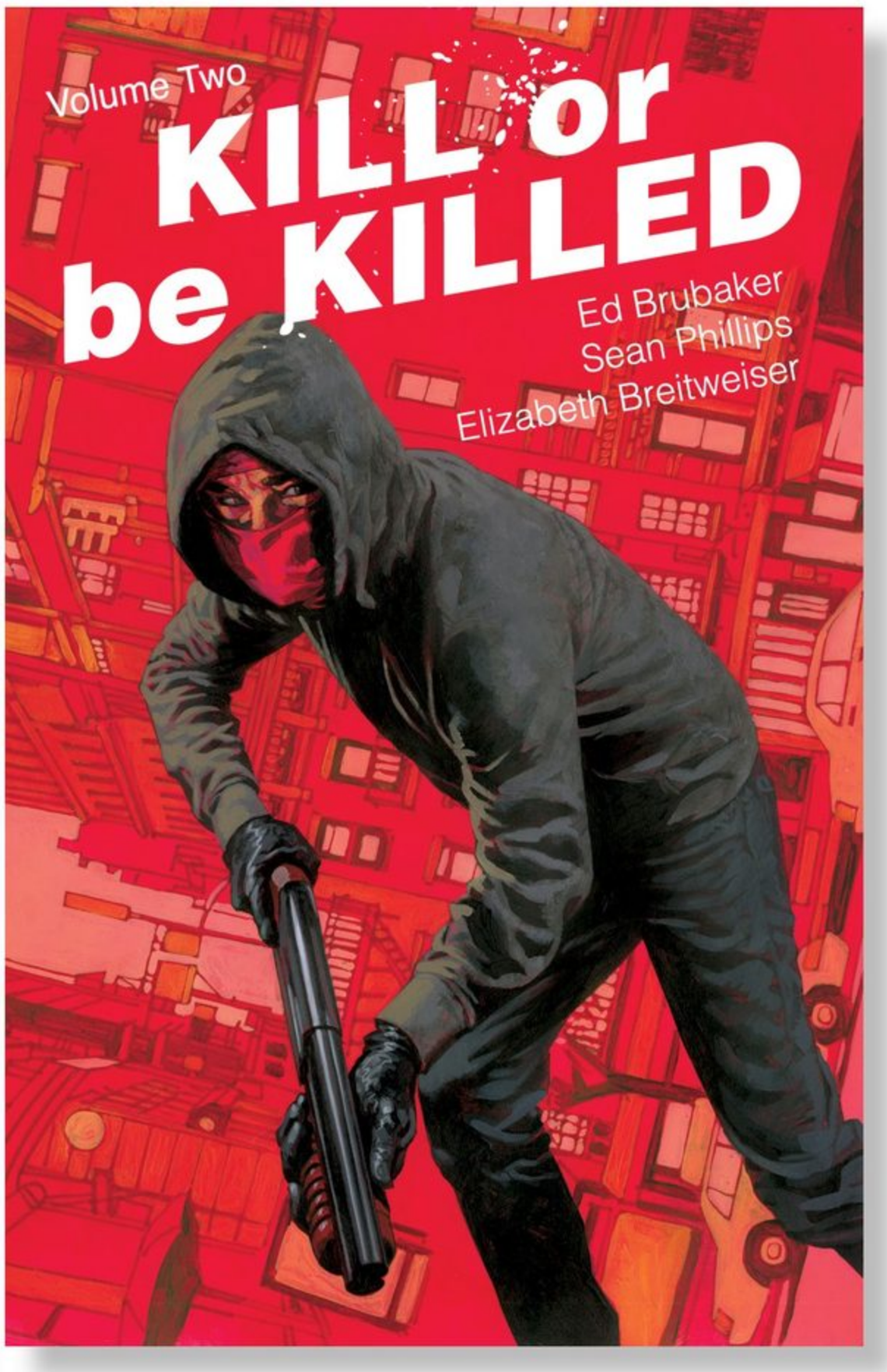
Elizabeth Breitweiser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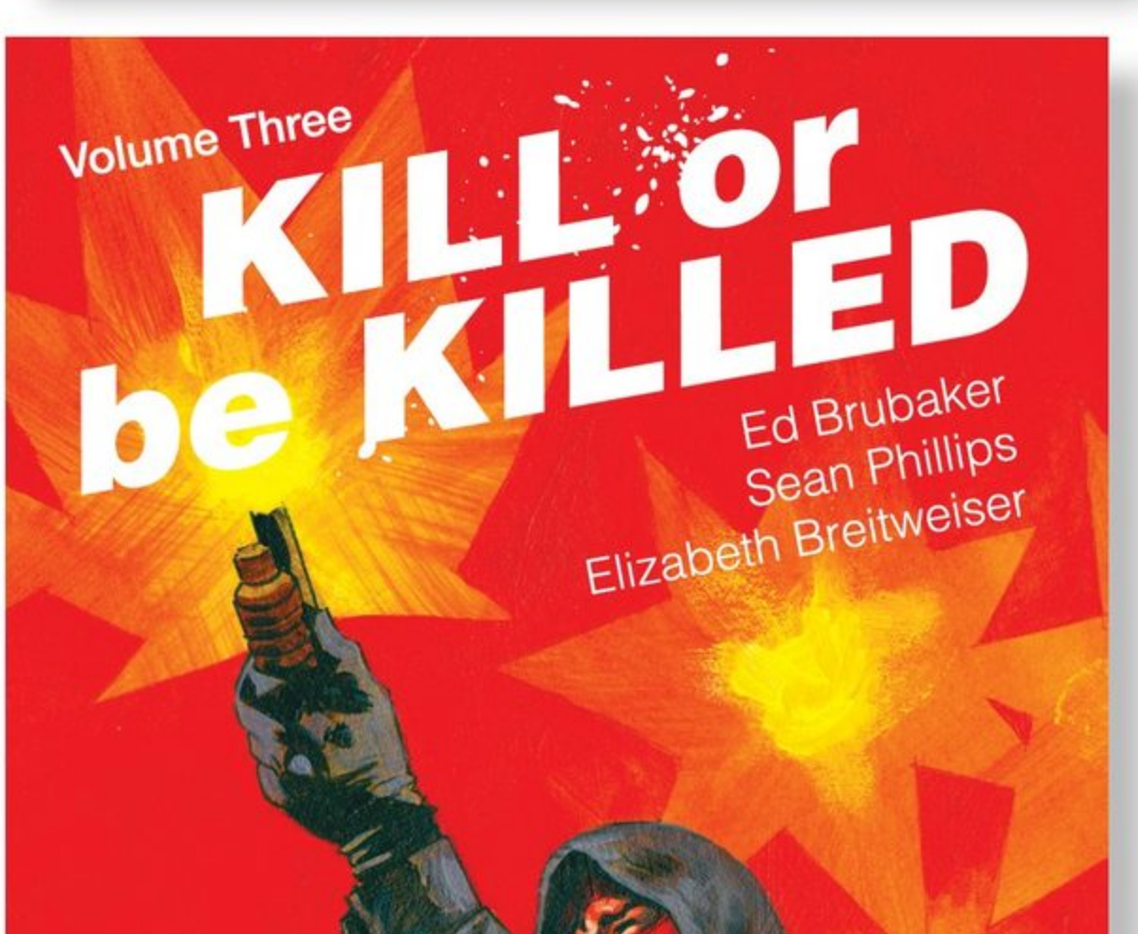
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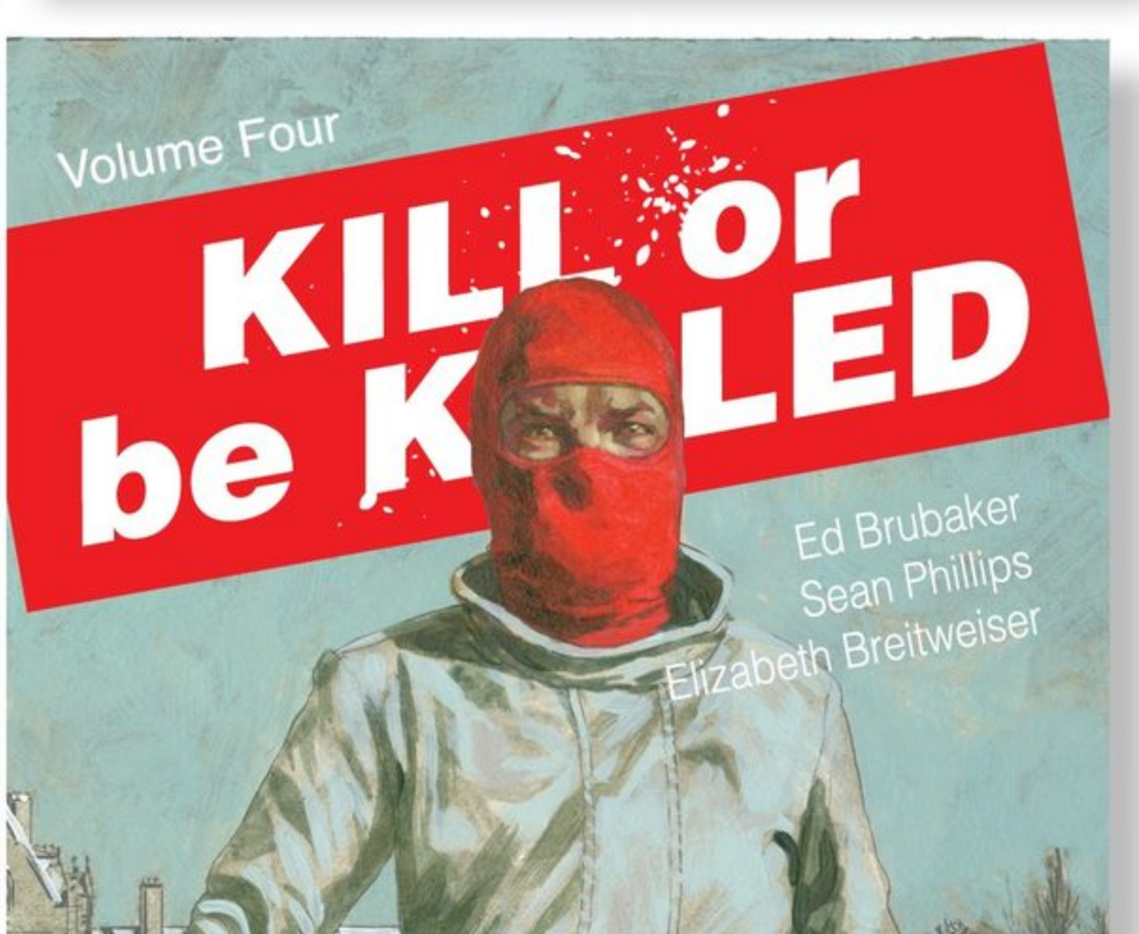
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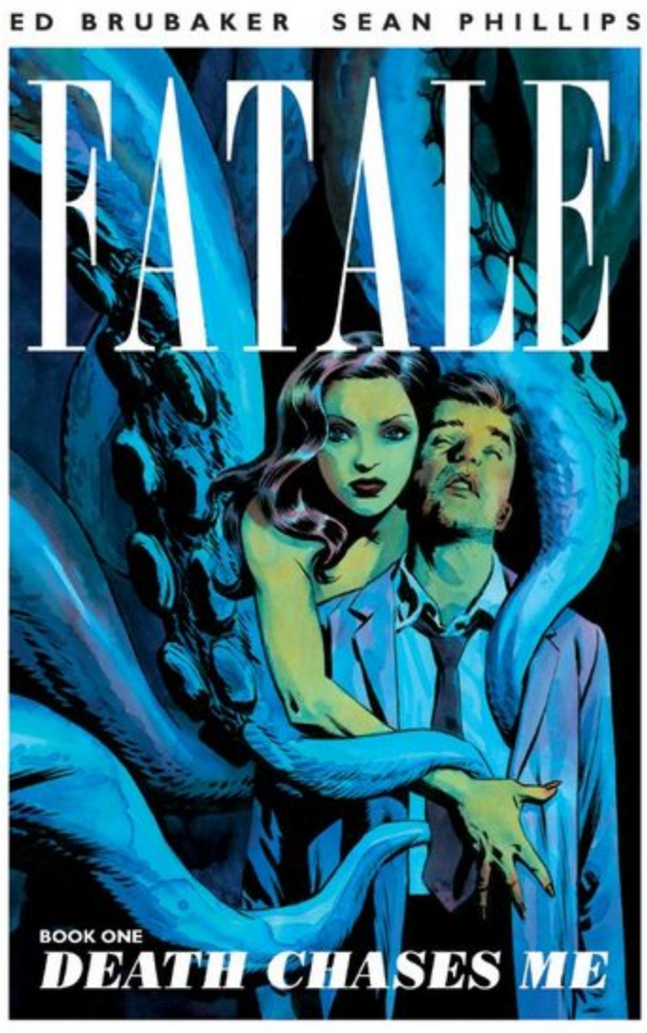

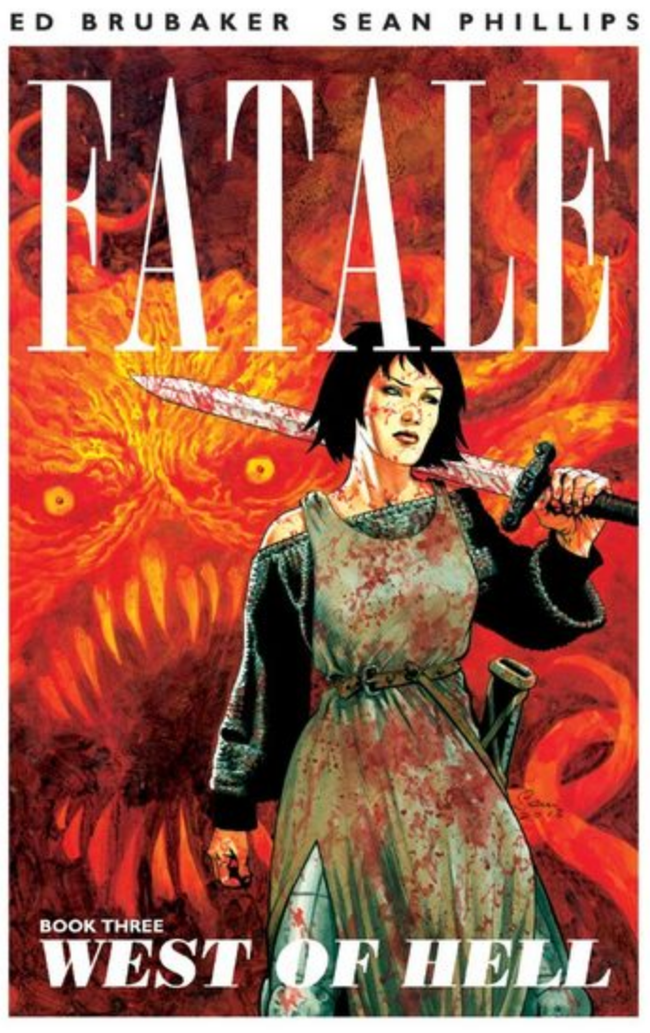

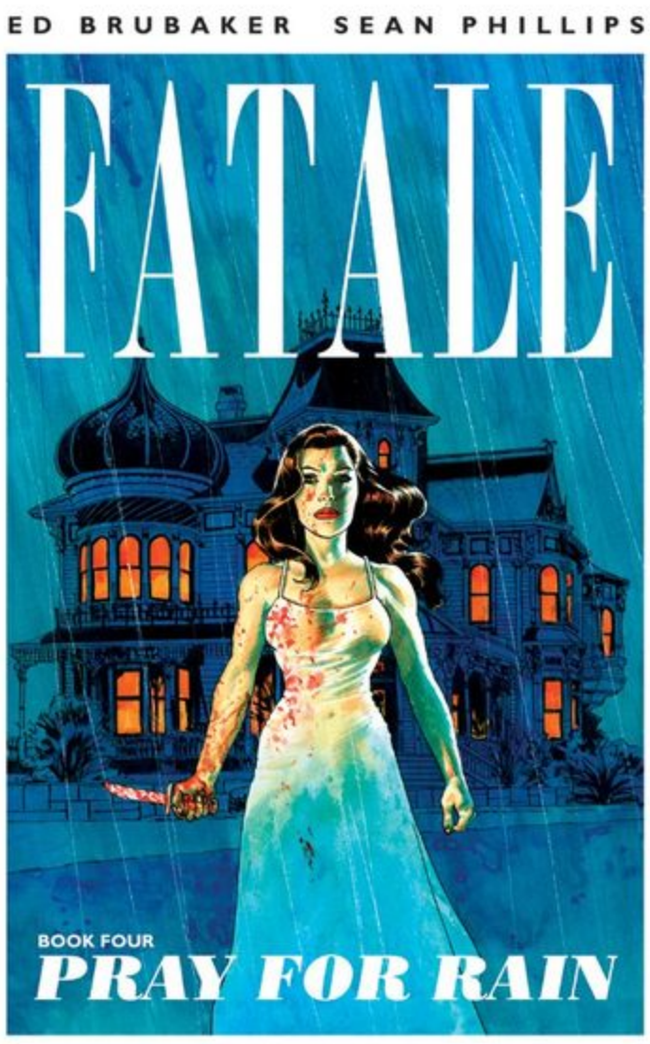

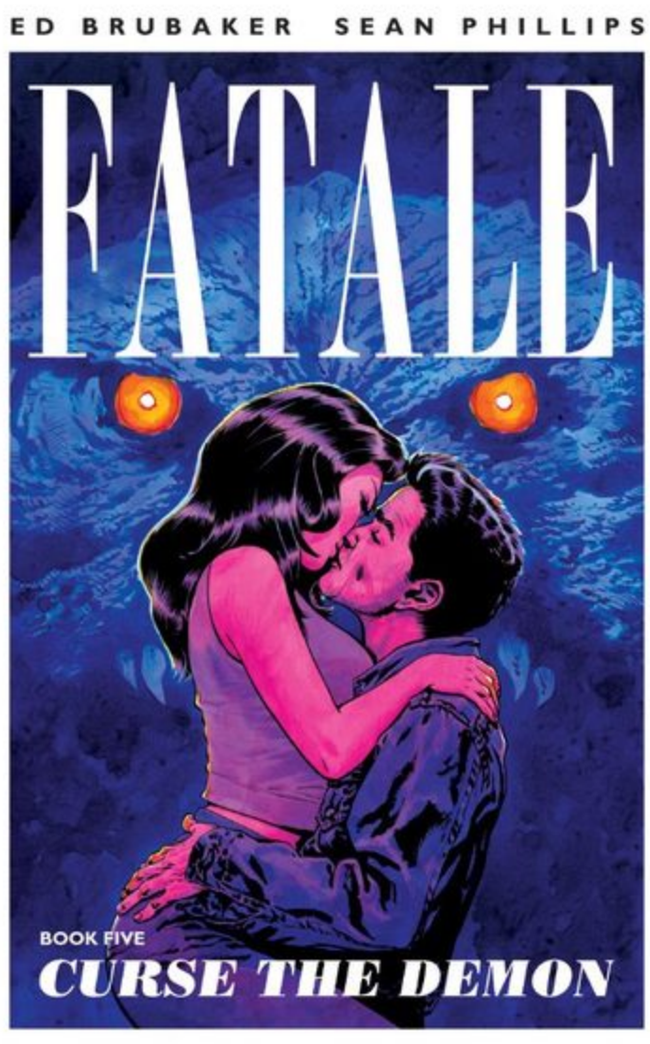

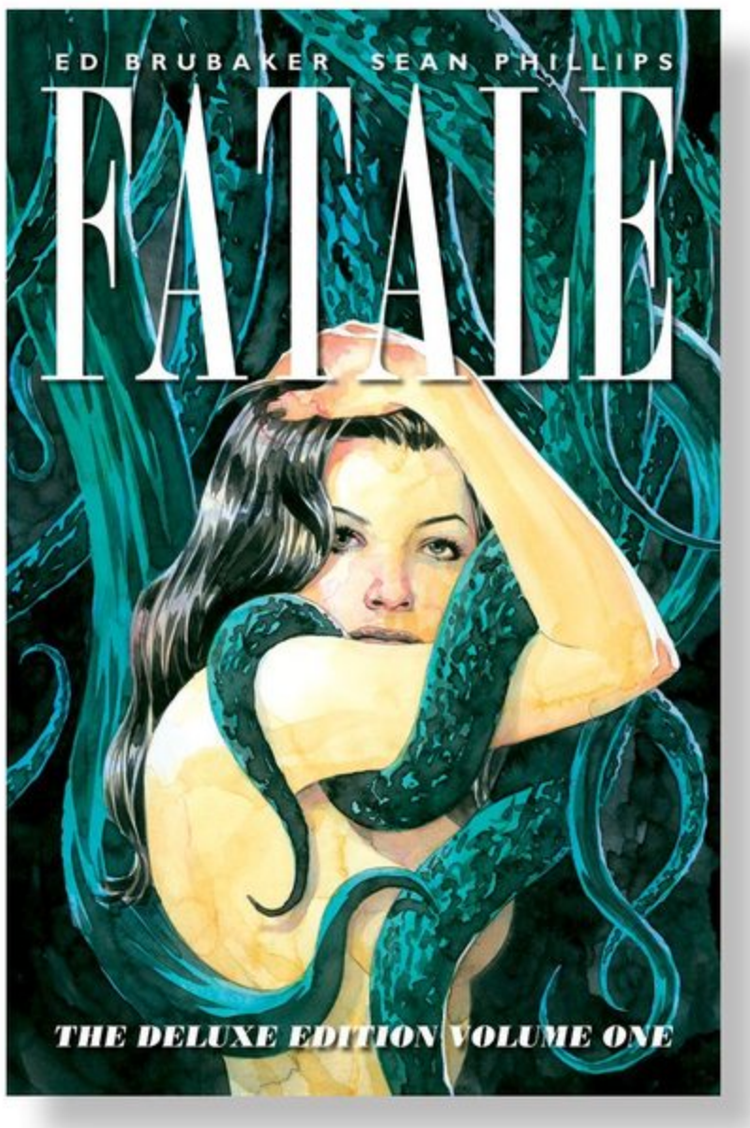

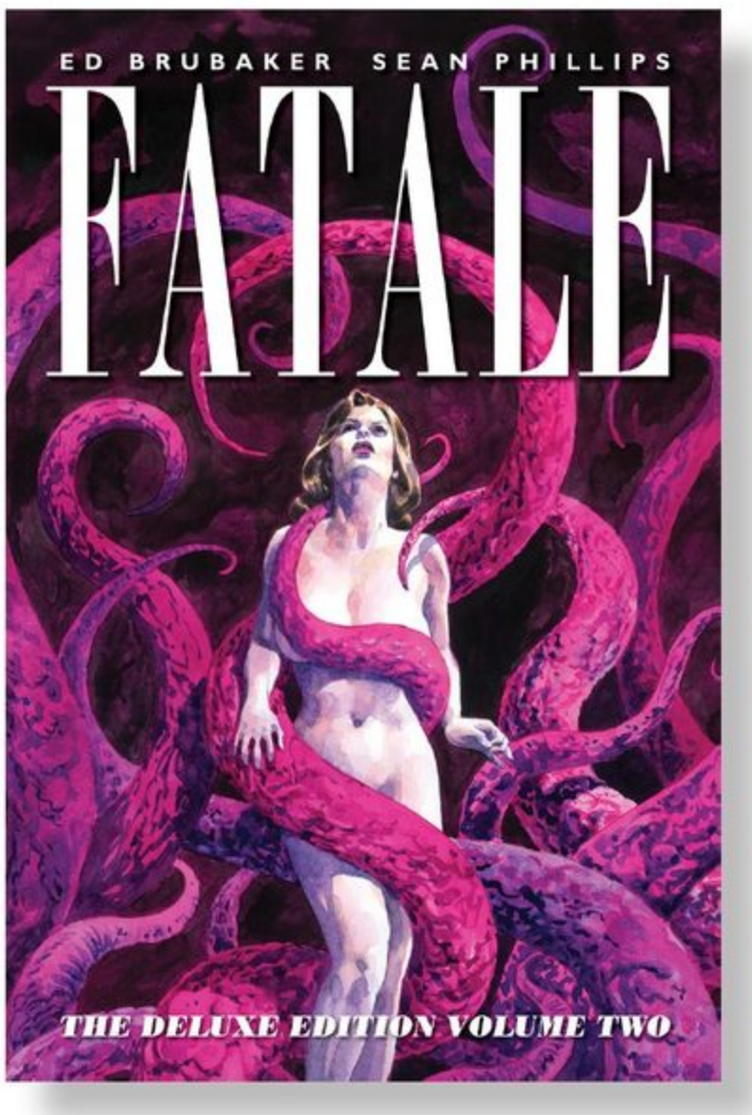

"Immortality may be a double-edged sword, but it's one the intoxicating Jo wields with a boundless grace in this addictive page-turner."

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